SUNNY BOY WITH THE CIRCUS

RAMY ALLISON WHITE

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from the six ward scho
when he was in the
Hospital
Miss Mccombs
Teacher.

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Sunny Boy did his best and went through the hoop safely

Frontispiece

SUNNY BOY WITH THE CIRCUS

BY

RAMY ALLISON WHITE

Author of
"SUNNY BOY IN THE COUNTRY," "SUNNY BOY IN SCHOOL AND OUT," "SUNNY BOY ON THE OCEAN," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

HOWARD L. HASTINGS

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Sunny Boy with the Circus

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SUNNY BOY WITH THE CIRCUS

CHAPTER I

RAILROAD TROUBLES

"IT'S my turn to blow the whistle," said Sunny Boy politely.

"Yes, it's his turn, Nelson," Ruth Baker urged. "You said Sunny Boy could blow it after you'd had six blows, and you've had seven. I counted them."

Nelson Baker took the nickel-plated whistle from his mouth and handed it to Sunny Boy.

"Here, you can have it," he said. "But I don't think you ought to blow on it too much, Sunny Boy. You see, you have lungs."

Sunny Boy looked surprised. Hadn't he always had lungs?

"I mean, using your lungs too much isn't good

for you," Nelson hurried to explain, noticing how Sunny Boy stared at him.

"But you blow on it," said Sunny Boy mildly, putting the whistle into his mouth.

"That's different, because I'm older than you are," Nelson replied.

He always told Sunny Boy and Ruth that. Because he was older, Nelson went to public school, he ate more candy, and he was apt to use the toys more than Sunny Boy or Ruth did. All because he was older than they were!

However, now that Sunny Boy had a chance to use the whistle, he wasn't going to waste time in arguing. He and Nelson and Ruth were playing train in Sunny Boy's back yard, and the one who had the whistle was the engineer.

"I want to whistle at the crossings," said Sunny Boy. "You're the fireman, Nelson, and Ruth is the passenger."

"I want to be the conductor and punch the tickets," Ruth announced.

"You can be the conductor the next time,"

Sunny Boy told her. "We have to have passengers, don't we?"

Ruth said yes, she supposed the train had to have passengers, so she climbed into the porch rocking chair, which was down on the grass and made a very good passenger coach, and Sunny Boy straddled a straight chair and began to ring the bell-cord which was attached to a real bell.

Nelson's job was to stoke the engine, and he was supposed to do this by shoveling in buckets of cut grass. The back yard had been cut that morning, but Timothy, the man who cut the grass in the neighborhood, had not yet raked it up. Sunny Boy had been using a seashore sand pail for a shovel, and though Nelson grumbled that he didn't see why he couldn't have a real shovel, he began to scoop up grass in the pail and pour it into the chair engine.

"We're coming to a crossing now," said Sunny Boy. "Toot! Toot-t!"

The lady passenger rocked herself so hard she nearly went over backward.

"If there was a conductor on this train, I could ask him if there was anything on the track," she said, apparently speaking to a rose bush. "But there isn't any conductor. I never saw a train like this one—no conductor at all!"

"Isn't that just like a girl?" groaned the fireman, but the engineer looked back and laughed.

"Toot! Toot-t!" he whistled shrilly. "Don't be frightened, lady—there isn't a thing on the track. I can see straight ahead for forty miles."

But he kept right on pulling the bell-cord (the bell did make such a lovely noise and there was no one at home but Harriet, and Harriet wouldn't have minded an earthquake, if it were the kind of earthquake Sunny Boy wanted) and tooting the whistle. He said he did it, in case anything should get on the track.

"Isn't it time I was conductor now and punched the tickets?" asked the lady passenger, a few moments later.

The engineer stopped blowing his whistle and changed back into Sunny Boy.

"I've been thinking," he announced. "Wouldn't you like to be the something on the track, Ruth? That would be exciting."

"How could I be something on the track?" asked Ruth cautiously.

"Why, you could use the express wagon for your automobile and drive right on the tracks!" said Sunny Boy, so excited himself that he almost saw how the wreck was going to look. "You could drive right on the tracks and there would be a crash!"

"I wish I could think of things like that," said Nelson, but Ruth shook her head.

"I don't want to crash," she declared. "I would rather be conductor."

Ruth's daddy said that when she had an idea in her head there was no room for another one until she had used her first idea. Anyway, she was very apt to want one thing until she had it.

"Let her be conductor, and I will be the wreck," said Nelson. "I'd like to be the wreck, Sunny Boy."

"How can I be a conductor if I haven't any passengers?" Ruth demanded.

"Maybe Harriet will be a passenger," said Sunny Boy quickly. "I'll go ask her."

Harriet was busy in her kitchen, but she saw, as soon as Sunny Boy had explained to her, how necessary it was to have a passenger on the train.

"I'll come out for just six minutes," said Harriet. "I can leave my cake in the oven that long, I guess. You mustn't tease me to stay longer, Sunny Boy, because your mother is expecting visitors, you know, and we need the cake for tea."

"I won't tease," Sunny Boy promised, pulling Harriet along by her apron. "All you have to do is sit in the rocking chair, Harriet, and be a passenger."

Harriet took her place in the rocking chair, Sunny Boy took his place in his engine chair, and Ruth stood ready to collect the tickets. She had a pair of pliers Timothy had left on the back porch and she thought these would make a

good conductor's punch. Harriet thought so, too.

"What is Nelson doing?" asked Harriet, who was always interested in Sunny Boy's games.

"He's going to be the wreck," Sunny Boy explained, as Nelson staggered up the cellar steps, carrying Sunny Boy's express wagon. "He runs in front of the engine in his automobile, Harriet."

"Ah, I see," replied Harriet, nodding. "One of these grade-crossing accidents you read about. But I don't call that very cheerful for a game."

"This is a cheerful wreck," Sunny Boy assured her. "No one gets hurt at all. You'll see, Harriet."

Harriet rocked gently and the Toot! Toot-t! of the train whistle began again.

"Tickets, please!" the fat little conductor said politely.

And Harriet took a cookie out of her pocket.

She meant to hand it to the conductor without a word, but the engineer was watching, and so,

it seemed, was the reckless driver of the automobile. It was the driver of the automobile who caused all the trouble—the engineer merely rang the bell louder and more furiously and forgot to blow the whistle at all. But the automobile driver was so excited at the sight of that cookie that he forgot what he was doing. He meant to rise, and instead he shifted his weight so that the express wagon—er—that is, the automobile, of course—coasted backward down the cellar steps, taking him with it.

"Nelson!" cried Ruth, rushing for the cellar steps. "Nelson, are you hurt? Where are you?"

Which, as Nelson said afterward, was rather a silly question. He couldn't be anywhere but in the cellar.

Harriet and Sunny Boy dashed for the cellar steps, too, and they were much relieved to see Nelson scrambling up from the floor.

"I'm all right," he said a little crossly. "The wheels slipped."

And he was all right, because he came up

the steps and was ready to go on playing train.

"I'll have to go in and tend to my cake," said Harriet, when she found that Nelson was not hurt at all. "Here's a cookie apiece for you. And, Sunny Boy, don't go roaming off anywhere; your mother said she was coming back in an hour and she will want to see you."

"I won't roam," Sunny Boy promised. "We'll stay here in the yard and play. Do you want to be the engineer, Nelson?"

Sunny Boy thought that to blow the whistle again might make Nelson forget his tumble. But Nelson had another plan.

"Say, Sunny Boy, let's have a coal train," he suggested. "We can use real coal. I saw it down in your cellar."

"That will be fun!" said Sunny Boy joyfully. "We can get some boxes, too. We'll have a regular coal train."

Nelson glanced at Ruth who was contentedly munching her cookie.

"You'd better wait up here for us, Ruth," he

said. "You might get your dress dirty in the coal bin. You wait up here until we bring up the coal."

"All right," Ruth agreed. "I'll blow the whistle while you're gone."

Ruth didn't like to get her dresses soiled, and, besides, she wasn't over fond of dark places. She suspected that the cellar would be dark, at least that part of it where Sunny Boy's daddy kept the coal. It would be much nicer, thought Ruth, to stay comfortably in the yard and blow on that fascinating whistle.

Sunny Boy and Nelson went down into the cellar. They did not mind the dark corners. There was an electric light, but it was too far above their heads for them to reach, and, besides, as Sunny Boy said, it wasn't really dark. Some light came in through the windows and the boys expected to find the coal by feeling for it.

"We ought to get some big lumps," said Nelson Baker. "You know my train of cars carries

big lumps of coal. And then we could use some little coal, too, if you have that kind."

"I think we have all kinds of coal," Sunny Boy told him, anxious that, however many different kinds of coal there might be, the right ones would be in his daddy's cellar.

"Well, I didn't know—some people only have one kind," said Nelson, following Sunny Boy over to the bins which were built under two narrow windows and were behind the furnace.

There was no fire in the furnace now, but Sunny Boy's daddy had had the winter supply of coal put in that week, so the bins were heaped high.

"These are the big lumps," said Nelson, as he stumbled over several large pieces of coal. "We'll need some of these, Sunny Boy."

"I think we'd better carry them over and pile them up near the steps," Sunny Boy suggested. "Then we can carry up an armful at a time."

Nelson thought this was a good plan, and he and Sunny Boy began to carry lumps of coal

over to the steps that led out into the yard. They carried three or four lumps at a time and piled them at the bottom of the steps.

"There, that's enough big coal," declared Nelson. "Now where is some of the little fine coal."

Sunny Boy stared around helplessly.

"I don't see any," he said. "But—but, Nelson, look!"

Nelson took a step backward, for two big green eyes were glaring at him from above a heap of coal.

"Gee, maybe it's a lion!" whispered Nelson, moving closer to Sunny Boy.

Sunny Boy didn't think it was a lion, but he thought it might be some kind of wild beast hiding in the cellar. He grabbed a piece of coal and threw it at the creature. And then he laughed.

"It's only the Henderson's black cat," he said, as with an indignant spit-z-z, a large black cat dashed past them and disappeared up the steps. "She often comes in here to hunt for mice."

Nelson was glad he hadn't seen a lion, and now he began to scramble over the coal, as though he were climbing a mountain.

"Come on, Sunny Boy," he said, tugging at a narrow board just above his head. "I think the little fine coal is behind this."

He gave the board another jerk and instantly a stream of fine coal poured over him and Sunny Boy. A cloud of fine black dust filled their noses and throats and Sunny Boy began to choke and sputter. And still the coal flowed down over them, a slippery, shifting mass into which they seemed to be sinking deeper at every step.

"I guess," gasped poor Sunny Boy, "this must be the little fine coal, Nelson."

CHAPTER II

HELPING HARRIET

SUNNY BOY said afterwards that he wasn't exactly frightened, but he was very uncomfortable.

Nelson was, too, and the more the two boys kicked and squirmed, the more coal seemed to come down on them.

But though the fine stream slowed gradually, it did slow, and presently Sunny Boy found he could scramble to the edge of the bin and down to the floor. Nelson followed him. Neither boy thought of the coal for the train, but scrambled up the steps as fast as he could.

Meanwhile, Ruth had been waiting patiently. She thought it took her brother and Sunny Boy a long time to get the coal for the coal train, but for a time she enjoyed using the whistle, and

then she became interested in turning a morning glory inside out, and she was trying to turn it back again when she saw two figures come out of the cellar.

Ruth stared in amazement. She saw two small boys with black faces and hands, such black faces that they made the whites of their eyes look queer by contrast. They had rumpled hair and black dust on their clothes and when they waved their black hands at her, Ruth screamed:

"Oh-h, Nelson! Sunny Boy! You're all black! You're as black as Jimmie Povey!"

Jimmie Povey was a little colored boy who went to Nelson's school. Indeed, Nelson was as black as Jimmie was, in spots. Here and there his face showed he was a white boy, but he was very nearly as black as the kinky-haired Jimmie.

"I'm going to tell Harriet!" Ruth went on excitedly. "Perhaps it won't come off. I never saw such dirty boys—no, I never did!" and talking all the way, Ruth dashed into the kitchen

and told Harriet to "come see what Sunny Boy and Nelson look like."

Harriet ran into the yard, and when she saw the two boys she stared for a moment, as Ruth had done. Then she began to laugh.

"For mercy's sake, what *has* happened to you?" asked Harriet. "How could you get as black as that? And company coming, too!"

"I think—" said Sunny Boy doubtfully, "I think it will wash, Harriet."

"You mean you think it will wash off," Harriet returned. "Well, I should hope so. Soap and water is what you two boys need, and plenty of it."

Ruth pulled on her brother's sleeve.

"You'd better come home and wash off, Nelson," she said.

Nelson thought so, too, and he followed Ruth through the gate and into his own yard while Sunny Boy went into the kitchen with Harriet and waited patiently while she filled a basin with

warm water and brought out a face cloth and a clean towel.

While Sunny Boy is having the coal dust washed from his face and hands it is a good time to tell you a little about him. Of course you have guessed that he had another name besides "Sunny Boy." His real name was Arthur Bradford Horton. That was his grandpa's name, too. In the first book about him, called "Sunny Boy in the Country," you may have read how he went to visit this same grandpa on the farm, of what good times they both had there, and of all the friends Sunny Boy made. That was a very happy summer for Sunny Boy, for later he and Mother went to the seashore and after that they visited the great city of New York where Sunny Boy made friends with the traffic policeman.

Sunny Boy traveled around a good deal for a little lad, but the trip that Nelson Baker envied him most, perhaps, was the ocean voyage that he and Mother and Daddy took to Porto Rico. Sunny Boy had such a wonderful time

on board the big ship—you may have read about his adventures in the book just before this one, called "Sunny Boy on the Ocean"—and in the strange and beautiful city of San Juan, that though he had been home some time he was still telling the other boys about it, and one of their favorite games was "stowaway", because Sunny Boy had found a real stowaway on board the Santa Maria, the boat that had carried him to Porto Rico.

But now Sunny Boy has clean face and hands once more and as you have been introduced to him we can go on.

"I ought to go over and see if Nelson is all right," said Sunny Boy, feeling of his nose carefully, where Harriet had rubbed it rather hard.

Nelson Baker and Ruth, you see, lived next door, and sometimes Daddy Horton said he thought the two boys got mixed on their houses. It did seem as though Nelson lived at Sunny Boy's part of the time and when no one could

find Sunny Boy in his own house or yard he was pretty sure to be over with Nelson.

"They're just like brothers," Harriet often declared.

Harriet had lived with Sunny Boy's mother since Sunny Boy was a baby, and she was absolutely certain that he was the nicest boy in all the world. She loved him dearly and scolded him now and then, but even when she scolded him she still thought he was the nicest boy in all the world.

"I wouldn't go over to Nelson's now," said Harriet. "If you go upstairs and get into a clean suit, you may help me fix the tea wagon."

Sunny Boy loved to help fix the tea wagon, not so much because he liked to see it look pretty as because there was sure to be little nibbles he could take as he helped. Harriet was very good about "nibbles;" she let little crumbs of cake fall off on the table and she usually spilled a few raisins and said Sunny Boy might have them. And there was sure to be one tiny sandwich too

many for the plate. No wonder Sunny Boy liked to fix the tea wagon.

"This suit is all right, Harriet," he urged. "It was spandy clean this morning—and it isn't much dirty."

"It's a sight," said Harriet. "You look as though you had been rolling around in the coal bin for hours. But I tell you what I'll do—I'll tie you up in an apron and perhaps you won't rub off on anything."

So Harriet took down a large pink and white apron from a hook on the door and tied it neatly around Sunny Boy, completely covering up his soiled suit. She rolled his sleeves up to his elbows and then he was really all right to help her, for his face and hands were very clean indeed. Trust Harriet for that.

"Who is the company?" asked Sunny Boy, peering into the red tin where he knew the chocolate wafers were kept.

"Your mother said Mrs. Blake—not that I

know her," Harriet answered, spreading butter on the thinnest slices of bread.

"Has she any little boys and girls?" demanded Sunny Boy.

That was the first question he always asked about company—Sunny Boy liked boys and girls his own age to come to see him.

"Your mother didn't say," Harriet told him. "Don't eat those wafers, Sunny Boy. Put three little piles of them on that gold plate."

"How many is a pile?" asked Sunny Boy.

"Oh, several," Harriet said, counting out little white napkins with silky fringes.

"Do you suppose Mother would like to have me roll the tea wagon in?" suggested Sunny Boy, standing off to admire his piles of little chocolate wafers on the gold plate.

"Now, Sunny Boy, you know you can't roll this heavy thing," Harriet said patiently. "Later, when you are older, it will be all right. Besides, you will be sitting quietly, helping your

mother to entertain the company. It is my place to bring in the tea."

And Harriet, having finished counting the napkins, rolled a plump raisin across the table to Sunny Boy, who caught it just as it reached the edge.

"Harriet," said Sunny Boy seriously, munching his raisin, "I feel just like going somewhere."

"My land, I hope you are not going to grow up to be a gypsy," Harriet said, in some alarm. "Hand me the butter knife, Sunny Boy. Thank you. Where do you want to go, for pity's sake?"

"Oh, anywhere," replied Sunny Boy. "I think I'd like to go where they raise chocolate, Harriet."

Harriet laughed as she placed a plate of little square sandwiches on the tea wagon.

"You're looking at that box of candy I'm about to open," she said. "But, Sunny Boy, chocolate doesn't grow."

Sunny Boy watched eagerly as Harriet untied

the string and emptied the box of chocolates into a silver bon-bon dish.

"Why doesn't chocolate grow?" he asked dreamily.

"Well, of course it does in a way," said Harriet. "There's the cocoa bean from which they make chocolate. But you can't go out and pick little chocolate cakes off the bushes, you know, Sunny Boy. It has to be cooked."

"Like sugar," Sunny Boy said wisely.

He really knew a good deal about sugar, for in Porto Rico he had visited a large sugar plantation and he had told Harriet all about it as soon as he came home.

"What is like sugar, precious?" said a familiar voice.

Sunny Boy turned and there was his own dear mother, standing in the kitchen doorway. She had been hurrying and her face was pink. She had on her best dress, too, and Sunny Boy and Harriet thought she looked lovely.

"How pretty that is, Harriet," she said,

glancing at the tea wagon. "I expect Mrs. Blake any minute now; I was afraid she might be here and I hurried, because the car was held up by traffic down town."

Sunny Boy scrambled down from his chair and the pink and white apron, which had come untied, fell to the floor.

"Sunny Boy Horton!" gasped his mother. "What in the world have you done to your suit? And company coming, too! Why, child, you look—you look perfectly dreadful!"

Sunny Boy glanced down at his suit, which was very dirty—there isn't any place much worse than a coal bin, you know, when it comes to dirt.

"I was going to put on a clean one, Mother," he said. "But I was helping Harriet. Nelson and I went to play coal train—"

"Dear, you haven't time to tell me now," Mrs. Horton interrupted. "Mrs. Blake is coming and she will bring her little girl and boy. Run

upstairs and put on your—Oh, there is the bell now!"

Sunny Boy dashed for the back stairs. He certainly did not want Mrs. Blake's little girl and boy to see him in a dirty suit.

"What suit, Mother?" he urged in a whisper, as Harriet went to the front door. "What suit shall I put on, Mother?"

"The blue linen," his mother answered. "Be sure your face and hands are clean, dear, and remember your hair. Let Harriet look you over before you come into the living-room."

Sunny Boy ran up the stairs as fast as he could go. He could dress himself, of course, but he was used to having a little help at special times like this. However, he was sure he could manage nicely, and he stripped off the soiled suit and found the fresh blue linen one in his bureau drawer without a bit of trouble.

"I wonder if my socks are all right?" thought Sunny Boy. "Mother didn't say to change 'em."

He put the blue linen suit on the bed and tried

to get a good view of his socks. He couldn't see very well, bending down. There was a mirror in the sewing-room—he would look in that and get the right view.

To reach the sewing-room he had to go out into the hall and he leaned over the railing at the head of the stairs just a moment, to listen. He could hear his mother talking and a strange lady answering and, yes, there was a little boy peeking up at him from behind the portière in the doorway.

Sunny Boy drew back. He did not wish visitors to see him in his underwear, of course. He must hurry and get dressed.

If he had known there was to be a little boy and girl for company he would, he thought, have asked his mother to invite Nelson and Ruth too. They would have liked the chocolate wafers. Then, too, Ruth could have played with the strange little girl.

He went into the sewing-room, but he had forgotten that the mirror was not arranged for

small people. He couldn't see his socks at all in it.

"I saw a stool in the closet," said Sunny Boy to himself. "I'll get that and stand on it and then I can see."

The closet in the sewing-room was pretty well filled, and Sunny Boy had to brush past a number of dresses hanging on the inside of the door to rummage around for the stool on the floor. It was warm and dark in the closet, too, and suddenly it became inky black.

Sunny Boy turned and tried to push the door open more widely. It did not move.

"Why, it's shut tight!" he said in surprise.

CHAPTER III

SUNNY BOY HEARS A SECRET

THE closet was hot and stuffy, and the more Sunny Boy felt around in it the more trouble he seemed to get into. Things fell down on his head and he seemed to be walking around on bundles and boxes. In fact, he stepped through the covers of two boxes, and he hoped he wasn't stepping on any of his mother's best hats. She would not like that, he was sure.

Then, after he had tried in vain to push open the door—he wouldn't call, for he didn't want the Blake family to come running upstairs and see him in his underclothes—Sunny Boy tripped over something, something else came down on him and wrapped around him like a blanket, and he pitched forward with a crash.

Bang! something went over with a clatter as

the door burst open and Sunny Boy sprawled headlong.

He saw the sewing table in a little heap and knew that he must have knocked it over and its folding legs had doubled up as it fell. It had been standing near the closet and when the door swung open it had crashed into the table.

He was still blinking, lying on the floor wrapped in the heavy blanket robe that he had pulled down when Mrs. Horton came running upstairs.

"Sunny Boy, what was that noise?" she called softly, peeping into his room.

Then she came hurriedly into the sewing-room and saw Sunny Boy.

"Why, precious!" she said in surprise. "What happened to you? Are you hurt, dear?"

"No-o," Sunny Boy answered doubtfully, kicking his feet against the blanket robe. "I'm not hurt, Mother, but I'm kind of tangled up."

"I should think you were," said his mother, lifting him to his feet and unwinding the robe.

"There—that's better. Dear me, you're not dressed yet! What were you doing in the closet, dear?"

"I meant to get the little footstool to stand on, so I could see my socks," explained Sunny Boy. "I didn't know whether they would do or not for the company."

Mrs. Horton laughed and said she thought Sunny Boy had better put on fresh tan socks. She stayed and helped him and fastened the buttons on the blue linen suit and brushed his hair just the way she liked it best.

Then, hand in hand, they went downstairs to see the company.

Mrs. Blake was a little round woman with the merriest laugh Sunny Boy had ever heard. She was always laughing. As soon as she saw Sunny Boy she began to laugh, and he laughed, too, though he didn't know why.

"It makes me laugh to think of that big crash we heard," said Mrs. Blake when Sunny Boy had been introduced to her and to the little boy and

girl who sat, one on each side of her, and whose names were Joe Blake and Marie Blake.

"When we hear a crash like that at home," went on Mrs. Blake, "it means that Joe has knocked over something."

"I knocked over something, too," said Sunny Boy. "It was the sewing table."

Mrs. Blake laughed again and said she knew he must have knocked over something.

Then Harriet wheeled in the tea wagon and Sunny Boy had a chance to look at the Blake children.

Joe was a little older than Sunny Boy. He looked as if he might be Nelson Baker's age. He was a round little boy and he bubbled over with laughter like his mother. Marie was a grave little girl, but she could smile very sweetly and when she spoke of her "daddy" her whole face beamed.

"Marie is Daddy's girl," said Mrs. Blake, taking the cup of tea Mrs. Horton handed her. "They have great times together."

Sunny Boy could pass the plate of sandwiches and he did it very nicely. He wondered what he could say to Joe and Marie to make them feel at home. But Joe, who was sitting near the window, asked him a question before Sunny Boy could think of anything to say.

"Who's that boy?" he asked.

Sunny Boy went over to the window to look out and Marie moved so that she could look out, too.

"That's Nelson Baker," said Sunny Boy. "He lives next door. He must have changed his suit in a hurry."

"Why did he change his suit?" asked Marie.

So Sunny Boy explained what had happened when he and Nelson tried to play coal train. That was the reason, Sunny Boy said, he had not been ready when his visitors came.

"Look—he wants you to come out," said Marie, pointing.

Nelson was motioning to Sunny Boy to "come on out."

"Ask Nelson to come in, dear," Mrs. Horton directed. "He's very fond of Harriet's chocolate wafers."

Sunny Boy ran to the door and asked Nelson to come in, but it seemed he was going on an errand for his mother and couldn't.

"We're coming over to-night, though," he told Sunny Boy. "My mother and daddy and Ruth and I. To see your company."

Nelson ran on up the street and Sunny Boy closed the door softly. He had not known that the Blakes were going to stay over night.

"He can't come, but you'll see him to-night," Sunny Boy reported to Joe and Marie.

"Has he any sisters?" asked Marie.

"Ruth is his sister. She is a nice girl—that is, she almost always is," Sunny Boy replied seriously.

After all the good things on the tea wagon were disposed of, Harriet came in and rolled it out again and Sunny Boy asked Joe and Marie

if they would like to see the book of pictures his daddy had brought from Porto Rico.

They sat down comfortably on the floor to look at the pictures, while the two mothers talked. Joe had a camera of his own, he told Sunny Boy, and he was learning to take pictures.

"I'll take yours when you come to see us," he said carelessly.

"All right," Sunny Boy answered. "That will be fun. Maybe Daddy will bring me in the automobile. Where do you live, Joe?"

"In Hopton," said Joe, turning over the leaves of the book to see the pictures.

Sunny Boy didn't know where Hopton was, but he did not like to keep asking questions, so he was silent.

"I didn't know it was so late," said Mrs. Blake, as the little gold clock on the mantel shelf struck the half hour.

"You'll want to go upstairs, of course," Sunny Boy's mother said, rising. "Sunny Boy, wait

for Mother. I am coming back in just a moment."

Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Blake and Joe and Marie went upstairs—Mrs. Blake said Joe must brush his hair before dinner and Marie must wash her face and hands—and when the guests were comfortably settled in the pretty guest room, Mrs. Horton came back and found Sunny Boy still on the floor looking at the pictures in the album.

"Mother, Joe has a camera and he said he'd take my picture when I go to see him," said Sunny Boy.

"Come sit in my lap, precious," his mother replied, smiling. "You're getting to be a big boy, aren't you? Almost too large to sit in Mother's lap."

But Sunny Boy seemed to like to snuggle into the wide armchair with Mother, just the same.

"Sunny Boy," said Mrs. Horton, speaking a little more slowly than usual, "would you like to go and visit Joe Blake?"

"In the automobile?" Sunny Boy suggested. "With you and Daddy?"

"No, Daddy and I can't go," answered Mrs. Horton. "In fact, Daddy wants me to go away with him. You see, Sunny Boy, you wouldn't understand it all, but there is an old man whom Daddy is very anxious to help. He fought in our Civil War and now he is old and poor and needs to be taken care of. Daddy is sure he can get him into a beautiful soldiers' home, where he will find old comrades and be happy and secure as long as he lives. But to get him into this home, Daddy will have to work hard first. He has to visit two or three cities to look at records and he has to go to courthouses to look up things that happened years ago. He wants me to go with him."

"I could stay with Harriet," said Sunny Boy softly.

"Oh, precious, Harriet is as good as gold! But I never went away and left her to look after you for more than a day at a time," Mrs.

Horton declared. "Besides, Aunt Bessie wants Harriet to come and help her—she is going to give a musicale and all her pupils will play and Harriet will be so busy days before and some time afterward that she wouldn't have any time to give to you."

Sunny Boy thought for a few minutes. It would be fun to go to see Joe Blake in a perfectly strange place. And he knew Mother wished him to go. He might be lonely, a little—but think of what he would have to tell Nelson Baker when he came home.

"All right, Mother," said Sunny Boy bravely. "I'll go to see Joe."

And right there you have one reason why Sunny Boy wasn't known as Arthur Bradford Horton except on letters and birthday presents that came to him through the mail. He was a smiling boy, and could always be counted on to be cheerful.

"That's my good son," Mrs. Horton said, as

she kissed him. "And there is Daddy's key in the lock now."

Mr. Horton, when he heard that Sunny Boy was going to see Joe Blake, said he wished he could go, too. He told Joe so when, a few minutes later, they were all seated at the dining-room table.

"Hopton is a mighty fine place to have fun," declared Mr. Horton, pouring gravy on Sunny Boy's potato. "Isn't it, Joe?"

"Oh, yes," Joe agreed. "And now that the carpenters are fixing our house there are shavings and sawdust and everything. I hope they won't be all finished before we get home."

Mrs. Blake laughed and said she hoped the carpenters would at least lock up their saws and hammers.

"I don't know whether Sunny Boy likes to play carpenter, but Joe does," she said. "I think the carpenters will be out of our way if they value their tools."

Sunny Boy hoped, though he didn't say so,

that the carpenters would wait. He liked to see them build houses and he and Nelson Baker went sometimes to watch new houses that were put up near their neighborhood. Some of the older boys played on the beams and once one was badly hurt when he fell off, but Sunny Boy and Nelson stayed on the ground and only watched. They had promised not to climb and they always kept their promises.

Almost as soon as the dessert was finished—it was sponge cake with whipped cream and a little red cherry on top of each plate—the door-bell rang and the Bakers came in. Nelson and Ruth liked the Blake children at once, and as the older people wanted to talk, Mr. Horton suggested to Sunny Boy that they play in the dining-room. Harriet had cleared the table and left the light for them.

"Here's something I bought on my way home to-night," said Mr. Horton, taking something from his pocket and passing it to Sunny Boy.

"Perhaps you children will know what to do with it."

Sunny Boy and his guests examined the little piece of red rubber under the light of the dining-room globe.

"I know what it is!" said Sunny Boy. "It is a pig! Don't you remember we saw some up town, Nelson?"

"I know—you blow them up," Joe declared. "Let me blow, Sunny Boy!"

"Let me," said Marie. "I want to blow up the pig."

"I want to blow up the pig!" echoed Ruth Baker, who generally wanted to do whatever anyone else did.

"Girls can't blow these things up," said Joe firmly. "Girls haven't enough breath. You can sit down there and watch us."

Ruth and Marie both thought that they could blow up that pig quite as well as the boys but as they were company they did not want to argue the question just then, so did as Joe directed.

It is true that Ruth did not often "act like company" when she came to Sunny Boy's home; but this evening she had come with her daddy and her mother and had come to see the strange children. That was different, she decided.

Marie and Ruth sat down and Sunny Boy gave the pig to Joe because he was really "company." Nelson lived next door, and of course he couldn't be as much company as a boy who came from a place as far away as Hopton.

"That isn't very big," said Nelson, when Joe was bright red in the face and the pig was swelled out like a balloon. "Let me try."

CHAPTER IV

TRAVELERS ALWAYS SHOP

NELSON took the rubber pig and got down under the table.

"I can blow better if I don't see you all staring at me," he explained.

Sunny Boy and Joe and the two girls waited patiently. They could hear Nelson, if they couldn't see him. He was puffing and panting and now and then he gave a little grunt.

"He sounds just like a real pig," whispered Joe.

A gurgle, then a giggle, came from under the table, and then Nelson crawled out, looking rather angry.

"You made me laugh!" he said. "That's no fair. You made me laugh, and how can I blow

the pig up big if you're going to make me laugh?"

"Sunny Boy can do it," Marie Blake said quickly. "Let Sunny Boy do it. Give him the pig, Joe."

As Nelson was tired of blowing the rubber pig, he was glad to hand it to Joe, who gave it to Sunny Boy.

Now, whatever Sunny Boy did, he did, as Harriet was fond of remarking, "with all his might." He sat down in a chair and began to blow the rubber pig very slowly and carefully.

The other children stood around him in a circle and watched.

"Gee, how big do you suppose it can grow, if he doesn't get out of breath?" Joe whispered.

Sunny Boy went on blowing steadily.

"It's larger now than when you stopped, Joe," said Nelson.

Sunny Boy apparently did not hear and went on blowing and the rubber pig swelled and swelled until instead of being red, it was a pale,

pale pink, because the rubber was stretched so tightly.

"Perhaps it's going to be as big as—" began Ruth.

She meant to say perhaps the pig was going to be as large as a real pig, but before she could finish the sentence, bang! the rubber burst and there was nothing left except the little wooden tube in Sunny Boy's mouth.

Ruth and Marie jumped and screamed when the pig "blew up." Joe and Nelson laughed. As for Sunny Boy, he was so surprised, he never said a word.

"Where did it go?" asked Ruth, looking around on the floor as though she expected to find some pieces.

"That's all there is left," Joe explained, pointing to the ragged fringes of rubber that dangled from the wooden tube.

"But you'd think there would be some pieces," insisted Ruth. "When I broke a saucer the other day, there were pieces left."

"Rubber is different," Sunny Boy said, finding his voice at last. "I wonder what made it burst?" he added sadly.

"I guess you had it blown up as far as it would go," replied Joe. "You certainly have a lot of breath, Sunny Boy. I never saw one of those rubber things swell out so much as that before."

Sunny Boy brought out one of his picture puzzles after this, and as that was something the boys allowed the two girls to enjoy too, they all worked at it pleasantly, and by the time Ruth and Nelson had to go home every piece was in the right place.

"So you're going away again, Sunny Boy?" said Mr. Baker, as he waited in the hall for his family to say good night.

"Are you going away, Sunny Boy?" Nelson asked eagerly. "Where are you going? You didn't tell me."

"I'm going to see Joe Blake," answered Sunny Boy. "He lives in Hopton."

Then Nelson and Ruth, who was listening too, wanted to know where Hopton was and when Sunny Boy was going and how long he meant to stay and whether his mother and daddy were going with him.

"He won't stay very long, because we can't spare him," said Sunny Boy's daddy, coming out into the hall. "A week or two at the longest, and you'll be hearing all about Hopton, Ruth."

"And we're going to-morrow," chimed in Joe. "We can't stay because the carpenters are fixing our house."

Sunny Boy had not known that he was going to Hopton so soon, but he didn't have much time to think about it that night. He was sleepy and so were Joe and Marie and they were all glad to go to bed as soon as their guests had gone.

In the morning it was rather exciting to get ready for the journey. He had to help Mother pack a suitcase with his clothes, and before they had it entirely ready, Daddy Horton drove up in

the car and announced that he wished to take the three children down town.

"The train goes at two fifteen and we have to have lunch first, remember," said Mrs. Horton.

"We'll be back, Mother. We just have to run down to the toy counter, but we won't stay," Sunny Boy's daddy promised.

So Sunny Boy and Joe and Marie got into the car and Mr. Horton took them down to a department store and explained on the way that they might each choose just one thing to take on the train.

"And as you'll have to carry it yourself, take my advice, and get something not too large or heavy," said Mr. Horton.

The store was Bell's, where Sunny Boy and Mother had bought his sailor suit when he was going to Porto Rico. Bell's had a wonderful toy department, and the smiling saleswoman seemed very glad to see them.

"Let Marie choose first," said Mr. Horton.

Marie knew exactly what she wanted—a doll.

She had thirteen dolls at home, her brother said. But that didn't make any difference. She wanted another doll and she found just the kind she liked best—a little doll made of china.

"I can wash it," explained Marie.

After Marie had her doll it was Joe's turn, and he found it hard to decide between a picture puzzle game—something like the one Sunny Boy had—and a little wooden cannon.

"If you take the game," said Sunny Boy, "perhaps you'd lose some of the pieces on the train. And if you lose just one piece, the puzzle isn't a bit of good any more."

"That's so—I'd better take the cannon," Joe decided, and he did.

While Sunny Boy had been waiting for Marie and Joe to choose what they wanted, he had also been looking at the different toys. And at the counter opposite the toy counter, he had spied what he wanted—a ball and bat!

"Say, we can have a lot of fun with that," said Joe, when Sunny Boy pointed out the bat

and ball to his daddy. "You just ought to see me pitch, Sunny Boy."

"He broke two windows last summer," Marie announced cheerfully.

"Well, Sunny Boy, we'll get the bat and ball, but try not to break any windows in Hopton," said Mr. Horton, smiling.

Sunny Boy's mother declared they looked like Christmas shoppers when they came back to lunch, Ruth with her doll, Joe carrying his cannon and a cannon ball tied to a pink string, and Sunny Boy with his bat over his shoulder and the new baseball making a great lump in the pocket of his blouse.

Mr. Horton was to take them to the train in the car, and though he said, and Mrs. Horton said, that there was plenty of time, it was impossible not to feel excited and hurried throughout luncheon.

"I don't know what you children would do if you were going to Europe," said Mrs. Blake, looking at Sunny Boy's red cheeks. "I would

rather miss the train than miss this cinnamon toast."

And Mrs. Blake laughed and Sunny Boy laughed with her. He liked to hear her laugh, and though he wasn't interested in Harriet's cinnamon toast, because he didn't feel hungry, he finished his piece and hardly knew it.

Mrs. Horton had finished packing the suitcase while Sunny Boy was down town, and as soon as luncheon was over the bustle began. Sunny Boy's daddy carried out Mrs. Blake's suitcase and the smaller suitcase that belonged to Sunny Boy and a long pasteboard box that held some new curtains Mrs. Blake had bought the day before.

Sunny Boy suddenly began to feel very queer. He thought it was the cinnamon toast—it had been pretty hot and there was a crust of it that he apparently had not swallowed, for now it was sticking in his throat.

"You're the best of little sons, dear," said his mother, putting her arms around him as he stood

by the window looking out at the car. "Daddy and I couldn't go and help poor old Mr. Ketcham if it wasn't for you. Because while you are with the Blakes, we do not have to worry about you and we can work hard to make it possible for the old man to get into the home. You're really helping him, Sunny Boy."

Sunny Boy swallowed and a piece of the crust slipped down. He felt better.

"I'll bring you something to surprise you, Sunny Boy," whispered his mother.

Then she kissed him twice—as she did when she came to say good night—and Sunny Boy kissed her. Then Daddy Horton came to say it was time to start. That meant everyone trying to say good-bye all at once and trying to go out of the door at the same time. Mrs. Blake laughed and Marie dropped her doll—which fortunately didn't break—and Sunny Boy found himself in the car before he remembered that he had not said good-bye to Harriet.

Harriet had not forgotten him, however, for

she came running out of the house, waving a little package in her hand.

"Wafers!" cried Harriet, so loudly that Ruth and Nelson Baker, who were standing on their steps, heard her. "Chocolate wafers for you, Sunny Boy."

Harriet put the package in Sunny Boy's lap and kissed him. Ruth and Nelson shouted:

"Good-bye, Sunny Boy! Have a good time in Hopton. Good-bye, Marie and Joe! Remember the pig, Joe?"

That made Sunny Boy laugh, and he was smiling as he waved to his mother and Harriet all the way to the corner. After the car had turned the corner, he could not see his house any longer.

"If that clock is right, we're late," said Mr. Horton suddenly, as he caught a glimpse of a clock in a jeweler's window.

"The dining-room clock is slow ten minutes—Harriet said so," Sunny Boy reported.

Mr. Horton pulled out his watch and hastily put it back.

"We'll just about make it, I think," he said and drove ahead a little faster than he had been going.

They very quickly reached the railroad, and as they turned into the street that led to the station, a long train was thundering in and they could see a crowd of people waiting on the platform.

CHAPTER V

ON TO HOPTON

"THERE isn't another train till four thirty this afternoon—we have to make it!" said Mrs. Blake anxiously.

Mr. Horton drove the car up close to the platform and jumped out.

"You will. Hurry!" he said quietly. "Take Joe's hand, Sunny Boy. Marie, hold fast to Mother. Now then!"

They all ran, Mr. Horton with the two suitcases and the box under his arm, Joe and Sunny Boy, one with the cannon and one with the baseball and bat, and Marie and her mother, though Mrs. Blake was too stout to be a very good runner.

"Hopton! Next car down," said the porter,

who stood beside the steps of the first car they reached.

They ran down the platform and another porter hustled them up the steps just a minute before the little stool was taken up and the long call of "All a-board!" sounded far down the station.

"Good-bye, Son. Be a good boy and the time won't seem long," Sunny Boy heard his daddy whisper.

He had just time to give him a bear hug and then the train began to move slowly. Mr. Horton stood on the platform and swung his hat till he was sure Sunny Boy could not see him any longer.

"I don't see where we go," Joe was saying in the car.

They were huddled in the vestibule, for though Mrs. Blake had her tickets, she said she did not know where their chairs were.

"We never got a ticket for Sunny Boy!" said Joe, in dismay.

Sunny Boy had one awful moment of thinking

he might be put off at the next station. He knew a boy who had been put off a train because his ticket was lost, and surely not having any ticket was as bad as having one and losing it. But Mrs. Blake only laughed.

"Sunny Boy's daddy bought his ticket early this morning," she explained. "Here comes the porter—now we'll be all right."

The porter took them into the car and stowed the suitcases safely away. He showed them where to sit, too, and Mrs. Blake and Marie had one chair, while Sunny Boy and Joe had another.

"It isn't such a long ride, and I thought you could be comfortable in one chair for a couple of hours," said Mrs. Blake. "Two fat boys couldn't, of course. But you are not very fat boys."

Sunny Boy put his ball and bat down on the floor and Joe put his cannon down beside it, but Marie put her doll on the window sill.

"There aren't many children in this car," she remarked in a disappointed tone.

But if there were not many children, there was plenty to interest them. When the Pullman conductor came through, followed by the train conductor, Sunny Boy was reminded of his game with Nelson and Ruth Baker and he told Joe and his sister how much more fun they could have had if they had had a punch for the tickets.

"Let's play train when we get home," Joe suggested. "That is, if the carpenters aren't there. If they are, it will be fun to see what they are doing."

The train made several stops after leaving Centronia—which was Sunny Boy's home city—and then it apparently settled down for a long steady run through the country. The children tired of looking out of the window and Sunny Boy thought it would be a good time to open his package of chocolate wafers.

Mrs. Blake was reading a magazine and she took only one wafer, which left four apiece for Sunny Boy, Marie and Joe.

"We mustn't get crumbs on the carpet," said

Sunny Boy, carefully spreading out the paper in which the wafers had been wrapped.

"We can give the crumbs to the birds," Marie said, biting into a wafer thoughtfully.

"Where are there any birds on a train?" demanded her brother.

"We can throw them out when we come to a station," said Sunny Boy. "Then the birds will find them."

Joe admitted that he had not thought of that, and when he found that Sunny Boy and Marie were going to leave a piece of wafer for the birds, instead of eating them all up, he was willing to leave a piece of one of his wafers, too.

"Do you care if we go to the door when the train stops?" Sunny Boy asked Mrs. Blake, when the wafers were gone. "We want to throw out some crumbs for the birds."

"We didn't get any on the carpet, Mother," said Marie, and she meant that they didn't get any crumbs on the carpet, though it sounded as though she were talking about birds.

"Well, Sunny Boy is having a good effect on you already," Mrs. Blake laughed. "At home, I am sorry to say, you often get crumbs on the carpet. I suppose there is no reason why you shouldn't take the crumbs to the door when the train stops, but you must promise not to go down the steps and not to get in the way of other passengers."

The children promised, and soon the jarring of the brakes told them they were coming to a station.

Marie hung back a little. She was inclined to be shy, and if anyone had stopped her and asked her where she was going, she would have run back to her mother. But Sunny Boy and Joe marched straight for the door. Sunny Boy carried the paper of crumbs.

"Where you all going?" the porter asked him, when they were almost to the door.

Sunny Boy explained that they were going to toss out some crumbs of chocolate wafers for the hungry birds.

"Why don't you give them to the little dog in the baggage car?" the porter suggested. "He's hungrier than any bird and he can't get out to eat."

"A real dog?" said Joe.

"A live dog?" Sunny Boy asked.

"Of course he's a live dog," said the porter. "I'll take you all back to see him. He's going to be a present for my little girl. Her birthday is to-morrow."

"Wait till we ask Mother," Joe said. "Marie, you go ask Mother if she'll let us go see the dog in the baggage car. Hurry!"

Marie obediently hurried, and as the train had stopped she did not fall against any of the chairs. She came running back, her eyes dancing.

"Mother says all right, but tell the dog not to bite us," she reported.

They had to wait a few minutes, because the porter was busy helping people off the car and others to get on. But presently, as the train started slowly, the porter led them through three

or four cars and they came to the baggage car.

"What a darling little dog!" said Marie, forgetting to be shy.

Sunny Boy patted the bouncing little black and white animal that jumped upon him and barked shrilly.

"Reckon he's lonesome," said the porter. "He's used to being with his brothers and sisters."

"Won't he ever see them any more?" Sunny Boy asked sadly.

"Reckon not," replied the porter. "But he'll forget about them in a week. Thought you had some cake for him."

Sunny Boy, thus reminded, hastily unrolled his paper and spread it down on the floor. The puppy ate the crumbs, wagging his tail at every lick, plainly enjoying the treat.

"He didn't leave any crumbs, either," said Marie.

Sunny Boy and Joe patted the dog again, but Marie only looked at him. But she did ask what his name was.

"The folks where I got him, called him 'Tweedles,' " the porter said. "But I don't think my little girl will like that for a name. No, like as not, she'll call him something prettier than that."

Tweedles, seeing that there was no more cake, yawned widely and then turned around and cuddled down on his blanket.

"We might as well go—he's sleepy," said Sunny Boy.

They trooped back to their car and Mrs. Blake said that in half an hour more they would be in Hopton.

"You'd better get your things together," she added.

Sunny Boy reached for his bat—but where was his ball?

"It's gone!" he declared. "I put it down there with my bat and now the ball is gone!"

"I'll bet it rolled away," said Joe excitedly. "That's just what it did, Sunny Boy! That ball has rolled under some of these chairs."

Sunny Boy dropped down on his hands and knees and Joe got down on his hands and knees and they began to creep along the floor, searching for the ball.

"Look!" cried Marie suddenly. "Sunny Boy, look! There's your ball!"

She pointed up the aisle, and there was the missing baseball—rolling straight toward them!

"I wonder how it got up at the other end of the car?" said Sunny Boy, making a cup of his hands and catching the ball before it could roll past him.

"Oh, it may have been scuttling up and down for some time," Mrs. Blake said, putting on her gloves. "The motion of the train would start it on a journey. Now, children, keep together. Look out, Joe, let the porter take the suitcases. Here we are at home again!"

Though Joe and Marie beamed as they saw the familiar station, Sunny Boy did not feel like smiling. Centronia and his home seemed very

far away and suddenly he was afraid that he was going to cry.

"Well, you don't mean to tell me this is Sunny Boy Horton!" someone said, as Sunny Boy went carefully down the car steps.

"Yes, it is, Daddy!" Marie cried, dancing around a tall man whose pleasant dark eyes were smiling straight at Sunny Boy.

"It *is* Sunny Boy," repeated Joe earnestly. "Honest, Daddy."

"Yes, I see now," Mr. Blake nodded, shaking hands with Sunny Boy. "But the last time I saw him he was in a baby carriage and I didn't get a very good look at him."

Sunny Boy knew how he had looked when he was in a baby carriage—his Aunt Bessie had a picture of him taken then and he seemed to be all white ruffles and ribbons and he didn't look like a boy at all—and he did not wonder that Mr. Blake had not recognized him.

"We'll have to take the jitney out to the house,

Mother," said Mr. Blake now. "The car is still in the shop."

They had to walk perhaps a block to get the jitney, and Sunny Boy—who was feeling quite like himself again—looked about him with interest. Hopton was a pretty town, not a city like Centronia, but a busy place for all that. Joe, who was watching for the jitney, was the first to see some red and green posters on the fence which bordered a vacant lot.

"They weren't there when we went away," he said.

"It's a circus!" cried Sunny Boy. "See the lions! Look at the tigers! And the elephants! Oh, what a lot of 'em!"

The three children forgot all about the jitney and ran ahead to study the gorgeous posters which showed them lions and tigers and clowns and trapeze performers doing the most wonderful acts one could imagine.

"Just look at the men and the ladies on the

horses!" exclaimed Sunny Boy happily. "Aren't they great?"

"We can go!" Marie declared, hopping up and down before a picture of a clown standing on his head on the back of a horse. "We can go! Daddy will take us! We went last year! We can go again this year! Did you ever go to a circus, Sunny Boy?"

Sunny Boy, his face beaming, nodded.

"Come on, Mother's waving," said Joe.

"Here comes the jitney!" added Marie. "Let's run—we'll have to hurry."

CHAPTER VI

THOSE FASCINATING LADDERS

THE jitney was a large green and yellow bus, and as soon as the children were settled in it they went on with their talk of the circus. There were only one or two other passengers, and the driver, who knew Mr. Blake, told them that the circus would show in Hopton the "end of the week."

"It must be very good," said Sunny Boy confidently, "because it is double."

"How do you know it is?" Joe asked.

"Because it says so," Sunny Boy replied. "I read it on the posters—'Whitlock's Double Circus.'"

"What is a double circus?" asked Marie, and her mother laughed and said she meant to ask that question herself.

"I'm not sure, but I think it means extra good," Sunny Boy said slowly.

"I'll bet it means two of everything," said Joe. "Two lions and two tigers and two elephants and two clowns—"

"They don't have two clowns in a circus," Marie disputed.

"They could if they wanted to," declared Joe, and he and Marie argued about the two clowns while Sunny Boy listened until the bus stopped at the corner of the street where the Blakes lived.

This was at the other end of Hopton and almost at the end of the town. The Blake house was the second one from the corner, and as soon as Joe had climbed out of the bus he gave a whoop of delight.

"They're still there!" he shouted. "Sunny Boy, they're still there!"

Sunny Boy didn't know what Joe was talking about, but he looked in the direction his friend pointed out and saw a large square house with a network of ladders on one side.

"The carpenters!" beamed Sunny Boy.

And Mrs. Blake, who was walking behind them with her box of new curtains under her arm, while her husband carried the suitcases, laughed and said that she was sorry for the workmen.

There were no workmen there when they reached the house, for they stopped work at half-past four and it was now nearly five o'clock. Joe took Sunny Boy up to the room he was to share with him—Joe's own room it was, and a very cheerful place on the third floor—and Sunny Boy unpacked his suitcase as Mother had told him to do, while Joe showed him where to put his clothes in the bureau drawers. Joe was proud of his room and he took good care of it. He had a good many "collections" and he showed these to Sunny Boy before they went downstairs.

There was one collection of pebbles and another of celluloid buttons and a third of paper "transfers" that, Joe explained, he had collected from trolley cars and buses and some of which

had been sent to him by uncles and aunts in various cities.

He had four dried peas in a glass, too, and these would sprout and grow before very long, he told Sunny Boy.

"We had it in school last year," said Joe. "You soak them in water and put them on wet blotting paper. I've had these in this glass for almost two months and Marie says they won't grow; but I'm going to wait and see. They're too good to throw away."

The supper gong sounded downstairs before Joe had finished showing Sunny Boy all his treasures, and they went down to the dining-room where Sunny Boy found he was to sit next to Mrs. Blake.

He felt a little strange, to be eating his supper away from home, but it was a very good supper, and in spite of the chocolate wafers he had had on the train, he was hungry. A tall thin girl, whom Mrs. Blake called "Carrie," waited on the table and afterward, when Sunny Boy followed

Joe out into the kitchen to get a drink of water, he saw Carrie drying the dishes while another girl washed them at the sink.

"This is Sunny Boy," said Joe. "He lives in Centronia. Will the carpenters be here to-morrow, Minnie?"

It was Minnie who was washing the dishes, because she finished rinsing a cup before she answered. And then she didn't really answer Joe's question at all.

"You take my advice and keep away from the carpenters, Joe," said Minnie. "They're behind now with their work and they don't want a parcel of children fooling around them."

"We aren't a parcel," Joe insisted, putting his glass back on the shelf over the sink. "There's only Sunny Boy and Marie and me. We won't bother anyone."

As they went out of the kitchen, Sunny Boy heard Minnie and Carrie laugh. He wondered if they were laughing at him. He didn't mind

if they were—everyone in the Blake family, it seemed, liked to laugh.

Joe was eager to have a game of ball with Sunny Boy's new bat, but Mrs. Blake declared that it was too late and that she was afraid they might break a window.

"Daddy said just this once you might water the lawn, Joe," she continued. "See if you and Sunny Boy can get out the hose and take care of the lawn nicely without getting soaked yourselves."

Though Sunny Boy didn't suspect it, kind Mrs. Blake thought he would be happier if he had something to keep him busy till bedtime. Even very brave and cheerful boys—and Sunny Boy was brave and cheerful—cannot always help feeling lonely and homesick when night comes and they are too far away from home for Mother to come into their rooms and kiss them good night.

But it was such fun to get out the hose on its reel and unwind it and turn the water on—

Sunny Boy and Joe played they were firemen and that the bushes and flowers were houses on fire—that Sunny Boy had no time to be homesick. He worked like a small beaver and when the lawn was thoroughly soaked and Mrs. Blake's flowers had had the drink of water which made them grow, it was bedtime and he was tired.

Marie slept in a little pink and white room next to her mother and daddy's room on the second floor, but Mrs. Blake came up to see if the boys were all right and to put out their light and kiss them both good night. Sunny Boy had a moment in which he wondered if his mother was missing him, but the next second he had turned over to be more comfortable and before he knew it he was asleep.

He was awake before Joe and made an interesting discovery the next morning. A long ladder went right past one of the windows of the bedroom.

"I wonder how far up it goes?" thought Sunny

Boy, and then Joe woke up and pattered over to the window to see the ladder, too.

"The carpenters must be going to work on the roof," Joe said. "Let's hurry and get dressed and go out and see what they're doing."

The two boys dressed quickly and a few minutes later were downstairs and outdoors. The carpenters were nowhere to be seen, but their ladders were waiting for them and there was a little pile of clean, curly shavings at the foot of one ladder.

"What are they doing?" asked Sunny Boy, squinting as he looked up and the sun streamed into his eyes.

"Oh, mending the house," Joe answered. "Daddy said the roof leaked and needed new shingles and Mother wants a sleeping porch on this side and the attic shutters fell off last year in a storm and Carrie wants attic shutters when it thunders and lightens."

Joe was hunting around for some of the fascinating hammers and saws and planes he had

seen the carpenters using when his mother had whisked him away to go visiting at Sunny Boy's house. But the carpenters never left their tools around at night, and they were safely locked away in their proper places. Joe couldn't find as much as an extra nail to play with.

"Come on, we'll climb up the ladder," he said, when he was convinced that he had not overlooked a saw or hammer. "Here's a long ladder that goes up to the roof, Sunny Boy."

"If it fell down and we were on the roof, we'd have to stay there," objected Sunny Boy. "Besides, I don't believe your mother would like us to climb ladders."

"She never said not to—not once," Joe declared. "And we don't have to climb up to the roof—we can go up as high as the sleeping porch and step off."

Joe was older than Sunny Boy and he knew exactly what the carpenters did.

"We ought to have overalls on and nails in our pockets," said Joe. "Say, the day before we

went away I saw a pair down cellar. They'd be all right."

"A pair of what?" asked Sunny Boy patiently.

"Overalls," Joe replied, already headed for the cellar steps. "They belong to the furnace man, but we don't have him in summer. Gee, I'm glad I thought of them! They'll be fine."

He dived down the cellar steps and was back in a moment with a long pair of blue overalls in his arms.

"You can wear them first, Sunny Boy," he said generously. "And you can go up the ladder first, too, because you're company. Only you want to kind of hurry, because Marie may come out and want to play, too, and she can't. And if we wait till after breakfast, the carpenters will be here and they might not like us to use their ladder."

Sunny Boy was obliging and he tried to hurry, but his fingers seemed to be "all thumbs," as Harriet would have said. He got into the overalls backward at first and Joe had to help him

out. Then, when he was finally in them, facing the right way, they proved to be so long for him that they might as well have been a skirt.

"I'll roll them up for you," said Joe. "I'd go in and get some pins, but Marie might hear me and ask for me to wait for her to get dressed. I'll roll up each leg and you'll be all right, Sunny Boy."

Sunny Boy, dressed in the overalls, made a very queer little figure, and Joe laughed as he saw him start for the ladder.

"I'm not laughing at you, Sunny Boy," he explained. "I'm laughing at the overalls."

"That's all right," said Sunny Boy, with his own cheerful smile. "But what'll I do for a hammer and some nails? If we're going to play carpenter, it seems to me that I ought to have some nails or something."

"Take shavings," Joe answered, gathering up a handful from the ground. "Put them in your pockets, Sunny Boy. I've seen carpenters have shavings in their pockets just lots of times. And

you can take your baseball bat for a hammer, can't you?"

Sunny Boy had brought his new bat and ball down with him, and now he tucked the bat under his arm and began to climb.

The ladder swayed a little and Joe called that he would hold it. Sunny Boy mounted slowly and he had not climbed more than half a dozen rounds when the legs of his overalls began to unroll.

"Oh, dear," sighed Sunny Boy anxiously, "I'll be sure to step on 'em if they come down very much farther."

And there he was, trying to climb the ladder and not step on the overalls and not drop the bat —which would be almost sure to fall on Joe's head — when Marie ran out of the house.

"Breakfast is ready!" she cried. Then she saw Sunny Boy.

"Oh-h, Sunny Boy!" Marie shrieked. "Come right down off that ladder! I'm going to tell Mother you're on the carpenter's ladder! You

come right straight down! Joe Blake, what made you let Sunny Boy go up that ladder?"

Sunny Boy was startled and he jerked around to look at her. The tall ladder swayed, Joe and Marie began to shout together:

"Don't fall—hold on tight!"

Then Sunny Boy shut his eyes, for he felt himself and the ladder toppling swiftly toward the ground!

CHAPTER VII

VISITING JOE BLAKE

I MUSTN'T drop the bat!" thought Sunny Boy desperately, and he let go of the ladder to hold fast to the bat with both hands.

He was sure the bat would hit Joe on the head, and of course he was much too excited to think that Joe would not be likely to stay at the foot of the ladder. As a matter of fact, Joe was dancing around on the grass, imploring Sunny Boy not to fall.

It takes a good many words to tell it, but though the time seemed long enough to Joe and Marie, the ladder took only a second or two to crash to the ground. Sunny Boy kept "right on going" as Marie later told her mother, and to his surprise and that of the anxious children watching him, he landed in a large bush that grew

close to the house. It wasn't a rose bush, either, and that was lucky, because falling into a rose bush must be rather painful, when you think of the thorns.

"Are you hurt, Sunny Boy?" asked Minnie, running out of the house in time to see Sunny Boy tumble into the bush.

Mr. and Mrs. Blake and Carrie hurried out, too, and Mr. Blake had Sunny Boy out of the bush in an instant.

"My dear child, are you hurt? You haven't broken any bones, have you?" asked Mrs. Blake, kneeling on the cement walk and beginning to feel of Sunny Boy to see if he was hurt anywhere.

"He's all right, Mother," Mr. Blake said cheerfully. "That was a lucky escape—perhaps the overalls saved him."

Mrs. Blake and Marie discovered the overalls at the same time.

"Oh-h, Mother! where did he get those?" asked Marie. "They belong to the furnace man."

Mrs. Blake laughed. She could not help it. Sunny Boy looked so queer in the overalls that were almost four times as long as he was.

"I got them for him," said Joe. "We were playing carpenter and a carpenter has to wear overalls. I let Sunny Boy have them first and climb the ladder first, because he is company. And now it's my turn."

"It's your turn to help me put the ladder back where it belongs," said Mr. Blake. "Then we'll go in to breakfast. And after this you and Sunny Boy are to keep off the ladders. Here come the carpenters. They'll tell you the same thing."

Sunny Boy felt rather uncomfortable about facing the carpenters and so did Joe. Their faces turned red; but there was no help for it. There were two carpenters, and they came up the garden walk, their tool boxes in their hands.

"Morning, Mr. Blake," they called pleasantly. "Folks got back? Yes, so they have! Good morning, Mrs. Blake."

"What happened to the ladder?" asked one of the carpenters, as soon as he saw it lying on the grass.

"Well, you had a little competition this morning" Mr. Blake told them. "This young man here—Sunny Boy, Mr. Mason—thought he'd be a carpenter, too. He has the overalls, as you see. And he climbed the ladder, but something went wrong and he fell—luckily into the sweet shrub bush."

"Tom said not to leave the ladders up," Mr. Mason said. "But I didn't think the children would be back so soon. Well, it's good it wasn't worse. But, Sunny Boy, you take my advice and keep off ladders till you're a few years older."

Sunny Boy nodded, and then they all went in to breakfast while Mr. Mason and Tom, who was his helper, went nimbly up the ladder, which they put in place as they had left it, and went to work on the new sleeping porch.

Minnie took the overalls and Sunny Boy was

glad to be without them. He didn't think he would have fallen from the ladder if he had not worn the overalls, but now he would not have a chance to see how well he could climb a ladder in his own clothes. Mr. Blake made him promise, and made Joe promise, too, before he left for his lumberyard, that they would not try to climb any more ladders.

The rest of the day Sunny Boy and Joe played with Marie, who was very fond of croquet, but who good-naturedly tried to play ball when the boys asked her to and spent most of her morning running after the ball, or else they watched the carpenters at work. It was fascinating to see the men make long boards smooth or to watch them nail narrow boards together so tightly that they looked almost as though they had always been one long, wide board. Marie liked best to see the shavings as they curled up under the plane, and Sunny Boy was charmed with the different sizes of nails.

The carpenters were good-natured and they

didn't mind being asked questions—when they were down on the ground where they could hear them. Sometimes they would even answer questions that Joe shouted up to them when they were on the porch. But in the afternoon, when they were working on the roof and Joe sat on a sawhorse in the yard and screamed questions at them, Mr. Mason grew tired of shouting his replies.

"I'll tell you everything you want to know when I come down," he said, and filled his mouth so full of nails that even Joe was sure he couldn't talk without swallowing some of them.

Sunny Boy liked it in Hopton, and in a few days he knew the town almost as well as Joe and Marie did. They were so far away from the center of the town that usually Mrs. Blake took a bus when she went to the grocery store. But Sunny Boy and Joe liked to walk. Minnie or Carrie sometimes forgot important things like sugar and butter, and once eggs, and as the grocery wagon did not make more than one trip

a day, someone usually had to go to the store in the afternoon.

Each time Sunny Boy and Joe did an errand they watched for the circus posters. Mr. Blake had promised to take them, and it was exciting to see the different pictures. As it drew nearer to the time, more posters were put up and once Sunny Boy woke Joe in the night by bouncing up and down on the footboard of his bed.

"I dreamed I was standing on my head, riding a horse," Sunny Boy explained when Joe woke him up.

"I wonder if they really do stand on their heads on a horse," said Joe at the breakfast table the next morning.

"It's lucky we haven't a horse, or you might want to try it," Mr. Blake declared smiling. "I did think of asking you and Sunny Boy to take a drive out into the country with me to-day, but of course if you are going to try to ride a horse standing on your head, I'd be afraid to risk it."

"Is the car fixed, Daddy? Take me with you,

Daddy?" begged Marie. "I won't ride a horse standing on my head, Daddy."

"I'll take all good children who are ready at three o'clock this afternoon," promised Mr. Blake, hurrying away to his lumberyard office.

Of course there was nothing to do but be very good, and Sunny Boy and Joe decided to play ball till lunch time. There was a vacant lot a few rods down the street where they usually went to play, because there was small danger of the ball hitting any windows. They invited Marie to go with them, but she said she would rather stay at home and play by herself.

"Lend me your cannon, Joe?" she coaxed her brother. "You always say you will and you never do. Lend it to me now—Daddy said you'd have to be good to go driving this afternoon, you know he did."

"All right, take it," said Joe. "But don't you break it. You're always breaking my things, Marie."

Marie ran off to get the cannon, which was the

one Mr. Horton had bought for Joe the day he bought Sunny Boy his bat and ball, and the two boys went to play ball. When they heard the factory whistle blow at noon, they came home. They found Marie sitting on the front steps looking suspiciously quiet and prim.

"I've been bad," she told them calmly.

"So bad you can't go this afternoon?" Sunny Boy asked anxiously, while Joe demanded to be told what she had done.

"It's really your fault," said Marie. "It was your cannon did it. I was playing with it in the kitchen and I shot it and the ball fell right into the eggs Minnie was beating for a cake and spattered them all over everything. The yellow went on the floor and the table and on Minnie's dress and apron—and she was so cross! But Mother said it was an accident and I can go this afternoon—I asked her and she said so."

"Well, you'd better be good up to three o'clock," Joe warned her. "Don't try any more funny stunts."

Marie said she wouldn't and all through lunch she was very quiet and good. But she disappeared as soon as the meal was over and when Sunny Boy and Joe went out into the yard they couldn't find her. The carpenters went home to lunch, for they lived near, and neither of the boys even touched the ladders now for they had promised not to. However, they could go up to the sleeping porch now, for it was nearly finished and a flight of stairs had been built to it, leading from the ground.

"It's like a lighthouse, isn't it?" said Joe, when they had climbed the stairs and were looking over the railing.

"Look—there's Marie," Sunny Boy whispered. "What is she doing?"

They could see Marie down near the sawhorse, and she was certainly behaving rather strangely. She seemed to be trying to walk up the side of a plank that had been left leaning against the house.

"I know! She wants to stand on her head," whispered Sunny Boy.

The next minute Marie seemed to have made her wish come true. Her feet waved wildly in the air, her skirt fell over her head, and her gingham bloomers were plainly seen by her shocked brother before she lost her balance and came down with a crash. Her feet went squarely into the tray of assorted nails the carpenters had left on the sawhorse and a shower of bright steel fell all around the ambitious Marie.

"Now you've done it!" scolded Joe, running down the steps, closely followed by Sunny Boy. "What are you trying to do, anyway?"

Marie sat up and pushed the hair out of her eyes. She was rather dizzy, but she wasn't going to tell that.

"I wanted to see if I could stand on my head," she said with pride. "And I did. Want to see me?"

"I saw you," Joe returned. "You were a

sight. And you've upset Mr. Mason's nails. He'll be mad."

"We can help pick them up," said Sunny Boy kindly. "It won't take very long, because they're all right around here."

Joe began to help pick up the nails, too; but he didn't like the idea of his sister trying to stand on her head.

"Boys do it, but girls shouldn't," he said. "Anyway, Daddy said not to, and maybe you can't go riding this afternoon."

"Daddy said not to stand on your head on a horse, and I didn't," insisted Marie. "But I know I could," she added, as she poured a handful of nails back into the box.

It took them till nearly three o'clock to pick up the nails and sort them, for Mr. Mason, when he came back and found out what had happened, declared that he would have to have the nails assorted by sizes before he could use them, but Sunny Boy and Joe helped Marie till every nail was in its right place. Then they hurriedly

washed and put on clean blouse suits and Marie put on another frock and when Mr. Blake came for them in the car they were ready.

He took them out to a farm, and it did seem that on every fence and telephone and telegraph pole they passed there was a circus poster. The "double circus" was a wonderful affair, according to the huge black type and the gay pictures, and Sunny Boy was so glad he was going that when he printed a letter to Mother that night, all he could think to write of was the circus.

At the farm, where Mr. Blake took them, there were plenty of horses, but no lions or tigers or elephants. The farmer and his family were going to the circus and, strange to say, the farmer didn't seem to be much interested in the animals.

"I'll tell you what I like about a circus," he said to Sunny Boy, who was helping him lift a basket of potatoes into the automobile. "I like the clown and the peanuts. The clown always makes me laugh and the peanuts remind me of

when I was a little shaver—I always did like peanuts."

"But I would rather see lions and tigers," declared Sunny Boy to Joe, when they were going home an hour later.

"Of course! You can buy peanuts any old time," Joe said scornfully.

"But the clown is funny," Marie reminded them, and they had to admit that it couldn't be much of a circus without the clown.

CHAPTER VIII

LAST LEGS

"WAKE up, Joe! Wake up, Joe! Don't you know what day this is?" cried Sunny Boy three mornings later.

Joe sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes. Then he remembered.

"It's circus day!" he shouted. "Daddy got the tickets yesterday afternoon. We're going to see the double circus!"

"'Whitlock's Gigantic Double Circus,'" said Sunny Boy, who thought that was a beautiful name for a circus. He liked to say it.

"Hey, what's going on up there—are the elephants loose?" Mr. Blake called.

"No, Daddy—but we're going to the circus," cried Joe. "Sunny Boy is almost dressed and so

am I. How soon do you think we ought to start?"

They heard Mr. Blake laugh and then Mrs. Blake.

"We can't go till one o'clock and the performance doesn't begin till an hour after that," said Mr. Blake. "So you can have breakfast first, at any rate. Mother says not to forget to brush your hair."

"We won't," Sunny Boy shouted, so excited he slapped his hair with the back of the hairbrush and made the tears come into his eyes.

But mishaps on circus days do not really bother anyone who knows his pink ticket is bought and put away for him and it was a smiling Sunny Boy who went down to breakfast with Joe. Marie was smiling, too, and the way tigers and elephants and lions and bears stalked through the conversation at the table was enough to make a timid person nervous. Mrs. Blake said so.

"Mother never goes to the circus," said Marie. "She doesn't like to smell the animals."

"Neither does my mother," Sunny Boy declared. "My daddy took me to the circus when it came to Centronia."

"All daddies should be useful," said Mr. Blake, his eyes twinkling. "I'll be a useful daddy today—and please be ready at one o'clock."

As if he had to tell them that! They took a walk in the morning and studied the posters again—though they really knew them by heart and Sunny Boy could recite all the printing on them without bothering to read the words at all—and then they went into the kitchen and entertained Minnie and Carrie by telling them what they were going to see.

"We're going to-night," said Minnie. "I hope you won't eat all the peanuts, but leave some for Carrie and me."

"We will," Joe promised. "And you can have all the lemonade—Daddy won't let us have any. But if there are ice-cream cones, we may have those."

Mr. Mason and Tom, the carpenters, had al-

most finished their work on the house and they were going to the circus that afternoon, too. They had come that morning to get their tools and put the ladders on their wagon and they had time to talk about the circus a little.

"I have to take my three little girls," said Mr. Mason. "They just dote on elephants."

"I like the lions when they roar," Tom declared. "Give me a loud roaring lion every time —then I feel as though I'd really been to the circus."

"This is a fine circus, so I guess the lions will roar," said Sunny Boy earnestly. "It is a double circus."

"I never saw one," Mr. Mason answered. "But I heard it wasn't much good—it just goes to small towns, like Hopton."

The carpenters drove away and Sunny Boy was sure that Mr. Mason was mistaken.

"It says 'double,' so it must be good," argued Sunny Boy. "Double means twice and so it will have twice as much as an ordinary circus."

"I think so, too," Joe said. "Gee, it's twelve o'clock—hear the whistle? Now we can eat and then pretty soon we can go."

They ate lunch and at last the hands of the clock in the hall did reach one; Sunny Boy had begun to think the clock had stopped and no one had noticed it. But it finally chimed, and Marie, who had been watching from the front door, shouted that the car was coming.

Mr. Blake had wanted to take the bus, for he didn't like to park in a circus crowd, but he had decided that after all it would be easier to use his own car than to try to get three children in and out of a crowded bus. As they drove away from the house, Mrs. Blake and Minnie and Carrie, all said together:

"Now be sure you don't get separated."

"I wonder if I'd better tie you together?" said Mr. Blake, his eyes smiling at Sunny Boy. "I could take a piece of cord and tie you to Joe and tie Joe to Marie and then tie Marie to me—I think that might be a good plan."

"But the string might get tangled," Sunny Boy pointed out. "People would trip over it and we might all fall down."

"Never thought of that," said Mr. Blake. "Well, then, we'll have to do the best we can. Whatever happens, we must keep close together, because I can't go home with one less child that I started with—that would never do."

Sunny Boy was sure Mrs. Blake wouldn't like it, either, and he resolved to stay near Joe's daddy all the afternoon. Marie always walked with her hand in her daddy's when she was near him, anyway, so Sunny Boy knew he didn't have to worry about *her*. And Joe wasn't likely to get lost, for he could find his way home from anywhere in Hopton alone, if he had to.

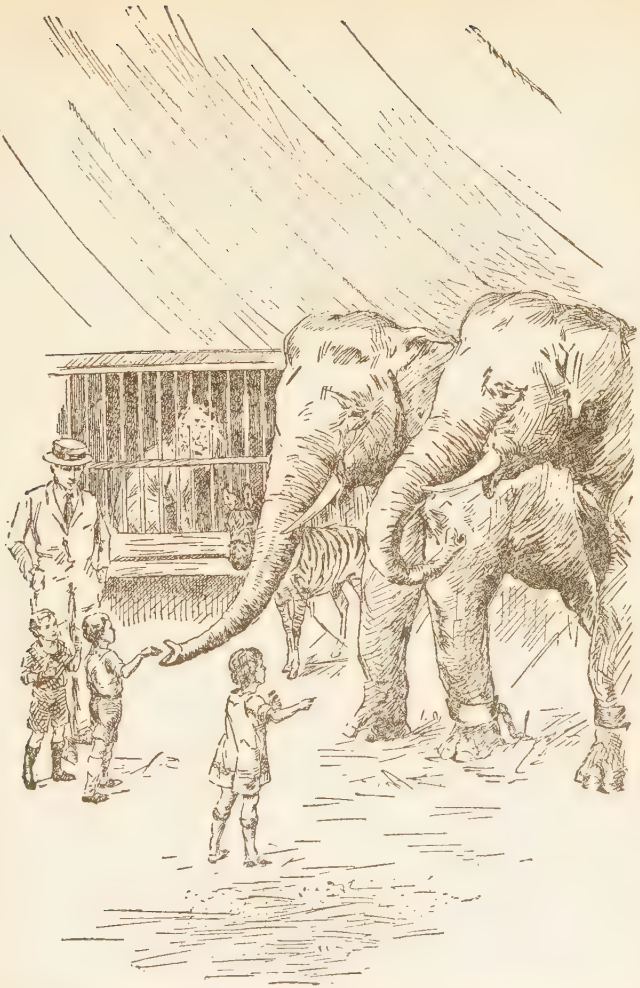
When they reached the circus grounds, there was one large grayish white tent and a circle of smaller tents around it. There were gay little booths built on the lot, too, and men selling balloons and pinwheels and flags, wandering through the crowds. Though it was early, there

was already a crowd gathered and Mr. Blake said he supposed they had all been as eager to get started for the circus as Sunny Boy and Joe and Marie.

"I'll put the car here, under this tree and we'll go see the animals," said Mr. Blake, backing skillfully down a narrow lane that bordered the lot where the circus had pitched its tents.

The animals were in a tent behind the big round one and there were not very many of them. Two elephants, a lion that sat in its cage and wouldn't roar a single roar, and a bear with a chain around its neck that wasn't in a cage but stood beside a hand-organ, were what Marie called the "most exciting" exhibits. Then there was a single zebra. The zebra looked pretty but wasn't at all sweet-tempered, for he kicked if anyone came near him. A pretty little pony and three or four horses were tied outside the tent.

A peanut vendor came up and Mr. Blake bought some peanuts for the children to feed the



The animals were in a tent behind the big round one

elephants. As they stood there waiting for another little girl to finish feeding the smaller elephants her bag of peanuts, a man came up to speak to Mr. Blake.

"Hello, Coles," said Joe's daddy. "Great way to waste a day, isn't it? But we seem to have company—everything in town is closed for the day and half the population for miles around is here on the lot; the other half will be here to-night."

"Not much of a circus, is it?" the other man replied. "They say Whitlock, the man at the head of it, has run it into the ground—takes everything out and won't put anything in."

"As a circus, it may have been good once, but if I know anything about it, it is on its last legs now," Sunny Boy heard Mr. Blake answer. "It must be discouraging for the troupe to have to worry along with so few attractions."

Mr. Coles went away and Sunny Boy nudged Joe.

"What are last legs?" he whispered.

"I don't know—why?" said Joe, opening his bag of peanuts.

"This circus is on them—your daddy said so," Sunny Boy explained. "I thought perhaps you knew."

"Oh, I didn't know you meant that kind of last legs," said Joe, who didn't like to admit he didn't understand what his daddy had meant. "I think they are the things they put under the wagons when they get stuck in the mud."

Joe had seen a circus parade with great red and gold wagons and many bands, and he knew that it often took six or seven horses to pull one wagon. He reasoned that if they stuck in the mud, as automobiles sometimes did, "last legs" would be very handy to help them climb out again. He rather thought last legs must be to wagons what spare tires are to automobiles.

"But the circus isn't stuck in the mud now," Sunny Boy argued mildly, while Mr. Blake held Marie up to feed the hungry elephants, "and

your daddy said it is on its last legs—I heard him."

"Well, what kind of last legs do you think they are?" asked Joe curiously.

"Perhaps the clown has wooden ones," Sunny Boy ventured, "and he's down to his last pair. Harriet gets down to her last pair of roller towels sometimes before the laundry comes."

"I don't believe the clown has wooden legs," said Joe, but as he didn't know positively, he thought it better to feed the elephants and wait till he saw the clown in the ring.

There was a side-show where the "freaks" were and Mr. Blake took the children in to see them, for they had plenty of time before two o'clock. There were only three freaks, and Joe was disappointed for he had been to a larger circus the year before, but Sunny Boy and Marie liked the thin man—who was called a skeleton—and the fat lady—who was very fat indeed—and the Gumbo, who was, so the man at the tent door told them, a very fierce savage.

"We have to keep him chained up all the time," said the tent man, "or there is no telling what he'd do."

"You could unchain him and then we could tell," Joe suggested.

"You wouldn't want him to chase you up a tree, would you?" said the tent man quickly. "Well then, you'd better be glad the Gumbo is held fast. Do not go too near him, or he might spring at you."

Marie hid behind her daddy when they came to the Gumbo, but Sunny Boy was so interested he walked up almost to the edge of the platform. The Gumbo had hair so long it touched the floor back of him and a beard so long it fell to his feet. And he was chained to a nice, comfortable rocking chair.

"Gr-r-r!" he said when he saw Sunny Boy.

"Where do you suppose he came from?" Sunny Boy asked Mr. Blake.

"I don't know—I certainly do not," said Mr.

Blake. "Africa—Asia—or perhaps the Hoop-la Islands."

"We haven't had those in school yet," Sunny Boy replied, watching the Gumbo stroking his long beard.

"We haven't, either," said Joe. "I'll bet he did come from the Hoop-la Islands, though—he kind of looks that way."

Sunny Boy thought so too, and they might have stood there the rest of the afternoon, staring at the Gumbo, but the sound of a bugle outside the tent told them that the circus was about to begin.

They hastily left the freaks' tent and went across to the big circus tent where a crowd of people were trying to get in through one narrow opening.

"Tickets!" a man was crying hoarsely. "Tickets! Reserved seats to the left. Tickets! Hey, lady, it's twenty-five cents more!"

Marie was afraid her daddy might have left the tickets at home, but he had them in his pocket

and in a few moments they found themselves inside the tent.

"Isn't it pretty!" cried Marie, and Sunny Boy was so entranced by the lights that he forgot to look where he was going and the first thing he knew he was rolling down a flight of steps and under the seats.

But he wasn't hurt, and Mr. Blake had him out in a minute. They went up some little board steps and then down more steps and finally found their chairs, close to the ring, so close that the fat clown who was running around in circles almost touched Sunny Boy's hand with his little willow switch as he ran past him.

"Isn't it great!" cried Sunny Boy, his cheeks crimson with the excitement. "I never saw a double circus before!"

Then they heard music and a great green curtain at one side of the tent began to open slowly.

CHAPTER IX

AN EXCITING AFTERNOON

"I DON'T think much of the band," said Joe, as the horns tooted and the drums went rub-a-dub-dub.

"Why, it's fine!" Sunny Boy insisted. "Isn't it, Marie? Look at the lady riding on the horse! Look at the pony! Look at the funny clown!"

Through the curtain came the band, followed by all the circus performers. There was the fat clown they had seen first, and the two elephants. There was a lady, dressed in white with silver spangles, riding a black horse. There was the bear that was led by a man who carried the organ and played it as he walked. The zebra was in the parade, too, and at the very end there was a tall man astride a small donkey. The man was so tall his feet dragged on the ground and

Sunny Boy was sure the donkey could have gone faster, if the man had only held his feet up. But he didn't. He seemed to like to let them drag.

"I *told* you this was a double circus!" cried Sunny Boy, who was watching everything intently. "They're going around twice!"

The parade wasn't very long, but as Sunny Boy said, it was going around the ring twice, and that made it a good parade. Joe was eager for the performance to begin, but Sunny Boy and Marie liked to hear the music. Sunny Boy made up his mind that he would speak to the tall man when he came round again and ask him to hold up his feet, so the little donkey could go faster.

"He's coming now," said Sunny Boy when the head of the parade had passed their seats a second time and he could see the little donkey walking slowly at the very end of the line.

The small gray animal came directly opposite Sunny Boy and the tall man's feet were dragging on the ground, just as they had been the

first time. He was a lanky-looking fellow, with ragged clothes and a silly straw hat through which he had drawn a sunflower.

"Why don't you—" Sunny Boy had begun, when suddenly the little gray donkey stopped short.

He stopped so suddenly and he planted his four feet so wide apart that the tall, lanky fellow was surprised. Before he could make up his mind what to do, the donkey kicked—up went those wicked little black hoofs and the next minute the tall man was doubled up inside the railing between Sunny Boy's knees and the boards that kept people from falling into the ring.

"He must have kicked you off," said Sunny Boy, while Mr. Blake tried to help the man to rise and Joe and Marie stared at him.

It wasn't easy for such a tall man to get to his feet in such a small space, and Mr. Blake was afraid he was hurt in some way.

"I'm—all—right," the man said jerkily, beginning to pull himself up by hanging on to the

railing. "Kind of doubled me up, but I fell easy."

"I told you this was a double circus," Sunny Boy whispered to Joe, and Mr. Blake heard him.

"That was a double spill, all right," he agreed, "and one not on the program I take it."

"You never can tell what that donkey will do. Hope I didn't hurt you," said the lanky man to Sunny Boy as he at last stood up and put his straw hat on his head again.

"No, you didn't hurt me," Sunny Boy answered politely. "But why don't you hold your feet up so the poor little donkey can go faster?"

The clown blew a whistle and the tall fellow leaped over the railing and landed on the back of the donkey. The patient animal had not moved since he had kicked.

"I'll keep 'em tucked up after this," said the man, and he put both feet up on top of the donkey's head and disappeared between the green curtains.

"I don't believe he knows much, do you?" said

Sunny Boy. "On my grandfather's farm they don't ride with their feet like that or dragging on the ground, either. But I like this circus," he added hastily, fearing that Mr. Blake might think he wasn't satisfied.

It was a rather queer circus, though. Even Sunny Boy had to admit that before the afternoon was over. Things kept breaking—the bridle of the horse on which the spangled lady was riding came unfastened and she had to wait several minutes while it was mended. Then the bear's chain broke as he was dancing very cleverly to a waltz his master played on the organ and at first the people were frightened.

"Oh!" could be heard from every side.

"Bears eat you," Marie insisted, hiding her face on her daddy's coat sleeve.

"This one won't. Look at him," said Mr. Blake cheerfully.

All the people in the tent were laughing and Marie uncovered her eyes. The bear had stopped dancing and had curled up comfortably

near the organ. He plainly meant to enjoy a nap while they fixed his chain.

And when the clown came out, driving the pretty little pony and zebra harnessed to a red wagon, one of the wheels came off that.

"He meant it to come off," said Joe. "It's a joke to make you laugh."

"Well, I don't believe he meant the horses to come off," Sunny Boy declared.

Sunny Boy meant the pony and the zebra, and, sure enough, they were walking along as sedately as ever, but the clown and the wagon were far behind them. The tongue of the wagon and the harness had come loose, and the pony and the zebra were dragging that much with them and apparently did not miss the wagon at all.

Mr. Blake was laughing so much that tears stood in his eyes and Sunny Boy was having a very good time, though he did not see what there was to laugh at. The fat clown didn't laugh—he looked angry. But Sunny Boy knew that clowns were forever playing tricks on people and

One of the wheels came off the wagon

perhaps looking cross was just one of his jokes.

After the pony and the zebra had gone behind the green curtain, the elephants came out and did their tricks.

"I said it was a double circus," Sunny Boy murmured contentedly. "There are two elephants."

Marie said the elephants were not pretty and they looked as though they needed a bath—in fact, she turned up her pretty little nose and preferred to watch the monkey that was playing with the clown.

But Sunny Boy liked the elephants, and he began to wish that he had a trunk instead of a nose.

"Of course it wouldn't look very nice," said Sunny Boy to Joe, who laughed at the idea.

"I should think not!" Joe snickered. "Suppose you went home with a trunk on your face where your nose ought to be?"

"I could stand in the middle of the street and put out my trunk and ring the doorbell," said

Sunny Boy. "I guess Harriet would be surprised when she opened the door."

Mr. Blake chuckled as he pulled Sunny Boy back from the railing.

"Don't fall over into the ring and have an elephant step on you," he warned. "That would be worse than exchanging your nose for an elephant's trunk."

Marie had been watching the monkey silently, but now she spoke.

"I think Sunny Boy's nose would look funnier on an elephant than an elephant's trunk would look on Sunny Boy," she said.

They could all imagine how Sunny Boy's straight little white nose would look on one of the huge gray elephants and it made them laugh.

"I think you'd better stay as you are, Sunny Boy," Mr. Blake declared kindly. "A trunk would be a nuisance around the house, too—suppose the swinging door shut on it?"

Sunny Boy decided that he would keep his own nose. Then, after the bear had come out

and danced a waltz all alone, the circus was over and the people began to try to crowd out of the tent as quickly as they had crowded in.

"We'll wait a few minutes," said Mr. Blake, and the children sat quietly in their seats and watched what was going on around them.

"That's the elephant man," whispered Sunny Boy, as a man crossed the ring, wiping his face with a bright green and red handkerchief.

"Is it?" Joe said. "He looks different without his coat."

The man was heading for an opening in the tent under the seats where Mr. Blake's party sat, and as he came opposite Sunny Boy he looked up and smiled. Sunny Boy knew he was the man who had put the elephants through their tricks, though then he had worn a blue and gold uniform and now he wore khaki trousers and shirt.

"Have a good time?" the elephant man called to Sunny Boy.

"Just fine!" Sunny Boy cried earnestly. "It

was a great circus. I never saw a double circus before."

"Glad you liked it," said the man and then he dived down under the seats and disappeared.

Most of the crowd was out of the tent by this time, and it was easy to walk up the aisle and out of the narrow opening. There was a boy selling ice-cream cones outside, and Mr. Blake bought each of the children one—Sunny Boy had strawberry, Marie chose chocolate. Joe liked vanilla, but he had to take chocolate, too, because the vanilla was all gone.

They found their car just where they had left it and away they went home, to tell Minnie and Carrie what they had seen and to prepare them for the circus that night.

"I wouldn't mind going again," said Joe, when he and Sunny Boy had finished describing the animals. "But I don't suppose many people go to see a circus twice in one day."

"Well, no, they don't," Minnie agreed. "I don't know as it would be fair, either. You saw

it this afternoon and someone else ought to have your seat to-night."

In a way it was fortunate that Joe had not planned to go to the circus again that night, for he and Sunny Boy and Marie were so sleepy they went to bed half an hour earlier than usual. A circus makes you sleepy, you know. Sunny Boy said it was because there were so many things to see at once and of course looking so hard made his eyes sleepy.

He and Joe had planned to go over to the lot in the morning to see the animals again, but at breakfast time Minnie and Carrie told them that the circus would not be there.

"It stayed just the one day, and by this time it is well on its way to the next town," said Minnie.

"Where is it going?" Joe asked eagerly.

"I heard a man say to Billings," replied Minnie. "You know where that is, Joe—the jitney runs there."

Joe knew where Billings was. He had gone

there with his mother to see the dentist. But he said it was too far to walk.

"Anyway, the animals weren't much," said Joe, who didn't feel very cheerful for some reason. "That circus was on its last legs."

Sunny Boy didn't feel very gay, either, and it seemed to him that he felt the way he had the day after Ruth Baker's birthday party.

"My mother says the day after an exciting day you have to be careful not to be cross," said Sunny Boy to himself. "I'm going to be careful."

He wished that he was home. Then he thought that wouldn't do—he wanted the old man to get into the soldiers' home and the man needed Mother and Daddy to help him. There was nothing for Sunny Boy to do but try to be cheerful and help Joe to feel cheerful, too.

"I wonder if you and Joe wouldn't like to do an errand for me this afternoon, Sunny Boy?" said Mrs. Blake at the luncheon table. "The walk into town will be good for you, and I need

a spool of thread and some carpet tacks."

"We can practise something on the way, Joe," said Sunny Boy, who had been busily thinking as he ate his baked potato.

"What?" Joe asked, but Sunny Boy declared that he would have to wait until they were on their way to town.

CHAPTER X

THE WRONG JITNEY

JOE wasn't eager to go to town—he really did not feel like doing anything anyone asked him to that day—but he was so curious to find out what Sunny Boy could want to "practise" that he was almost cheerful when they set off together soon after lunch.

"Now what can we practise?" asked Joe eagerly. "What is that stuffed in your blouse?"

"I found it in the trash basket this morning," Sunny Boy answered, pulling something long and black out of the opening in his blouse. "Minnie said it wasn't any good, so I took it."

Joe stared and looked disappointed.

"It's nothing but that old piece of hose," he said scornfully. "We kept it to beat rugs with after it burst, and now it's too old to be any good

even for that. I don't see what you want with a dirty old piece of hose."

"It isn't dirty," the patient Sunny Boy explained. "I washed it in the sink. And—don't you see?—we can pretend it is the trunk of an elephant."

"You can't make it stay on," said Joe, scuffing in the dirt, though he knew his mother didn't like him to do that.

"I can, too," Sunny Boy argued. "You wait and see."

They stopped under a tree on somebody's lawn —though it was a long walk to the shops, which were in the center of Hopton, there were lawns and gardens and houses all along the streets— and Joe sat down on the grass while Sunny Boy proceeded to show him how to "practise" wearing a rubber trunk.

Sunny Boy had punched three holes in the piece of hose and threaded string through these holes. Two pieces of string went over his ears and tied behind his head and the third piece went

down his chin and was fastened to a button on his blouse.

"Say, it does look something like a trunk," cried Joe, when Sunny Boy had all the strings tied. "Let me try it, Sunny Boy!"

"Wait till I waggle it," said Sunny Boy, swinging the hose gently as he had seen the elephants wave their trunks. "It's hard—to—breathe through it, and it smells—kind—of queer!"

But he waved the hose back and forth, and it really did look something like the trunk of an elephant.

"You ought to make it pick up things. Let me try," Joe urged. "Let me have it, Sunny Boy, and I'll show you how to pick up things with it."

Sunny Boy would have liked to wear his "trunk" a little longer, but he did not wish to seem selfish, so he untied the strings and gave the piece of hose to Joe.

"I'll bet I can pick up my handkerchief,"

boasted Joe, putting his small freckled nose into the tube and tying the strings as he had seen Sunny Boy do.

But though he tried very hard indeed, he could not pick his handkerchief up from the ground where he had tossed it. Joe didn't know it, but there are muscles at the tip of the elephant's trunk which make it flexible and which enable him to pick up things as we do with our fingers. The rubber hose flapped on the grass, but it could not pick up the handkerchief.

"I think that's a silly stunt, anyway," said Joe crossly, after he had spent several minutes trying to get his handkerchief. "Anyone knows it isn't really a trunk—it's just a piece of rubber hose."

"Well, I'm going to keep it and practise it more," Sunny Boy declared, unfastening the strings for Joe. "Perhaps, when I go home, Daddy can fix it at the end so it will pick up handkerchiefs."

Joe didn't believe Sunny Boy's daddy could

do this and he wanted to throw away the piece of hose, but Sunny Boy insisted he meant to save it.

"Well, if you want to carry it, all right," said Joe. "I don't care what you do with it. But I'm going on and get the tacks and the thread."

The way he spoke you might have thought he didn't expect Sunny Boy to go with him. Most of the time Joe was a cheerful enough boy and laughed almost as much as his mother did. But the day after the circus did not agree with him and he was what Marie called "touchy." However, Sunny Boy knew he was not really cross, so he simply picked up his rubber hose and trotted on after Joe, running a few steps now and then to keep up with him.

When they reached the hardware store, Joe felt better. It was such a bustling place, it was hard not to feel interested and excited as soon as you stepped inside the door. Such gleaming saws—Joe had a weakness for saws—and hammers were displayed behind the counter.

Such fascinating boxes and tiny kegs of nails stood around, opened, for exploring fingers to handle. There were so many different kinds of tools in glass cases and, best of all, so many beautiful tool chests to be seen.

Joe had always said that he meant to be a carpenter when he grew up and he could no more pass by a tool chest without stopping to look at it than he could fly—his daddy said so. And he couldn't fly at all, so you may know that he couldn't help stopping to see the tool chests.

"Mr. Harkness is busy—let's look at these things," whispered Joe to Sunny Boy, when he saw that the clerk was busy at the counter.

There were three or four clerks, but there were also several customers in the store and Sunny Boy and Joe knew they would have to wait their turn. They were looking at a wonderful tool chest that opened out in three places and had drawers in it, for all the world like a bureau, and which Joe thought must hold a thousand tools, when suddenly a woman began to shriek.

"Ow!" she screamed. "Take it away! The great big nasty horrid thing! Mr. Gibney—look at it—take it away, quick!"

Everyone looked astonished and a little frightened and Mr. Gibney—who owned the hardware store—asked the frightened woman what the matter was.

"A snake!" she screamed. "An awful, ugly, long, black snake! There it is, curled up by that pile of rope. See it over there near the post?"

Sunny Boy looked as everyone else did. But, while everyone else stood still, he ran over to the pile of rope and stooped down.

"That isn't a snake," he said politely. "That's a piece of rubber hose. I was using it to make an elephant's trunk."

He picked it up to show the woman that she had been afraid of a piece of rubber, but she backed away from him and began to scold as loudly as she had screamed.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to frighten people into fits," she told the surprised

Sunny Boy. "That certainly looked exactly like a black snake coiled up and it's a mercy I didn't faint dead away. You take that thing outdoors and throw it away this minute."

Mr. Gibney knew Sunny Boy because he had been to the store several times with Joe, and he was sure he had not meant to frighten anyone.

"You leave the hose with me, Sunny Boy," he said kindly, "and stop in and get it on your way home. I'll keep it back of the counter for you and then no one will get nervous."

Sunny Boy was very glad to do this, for he did not want to throw away his piece of hose. A few minutes later Mr. Harkness was ready to wait on Joe and gave him the papers of tacks Mrs. Blake had asked for, and the two boys were ready to go to the other end of the street where Miss Mamie Winters kept a little notion store and sold spools of thread.

"It's a good thing you left that hose with Mr. Gibney," said Joe, as he and Sunny Boy went out of the hardware store. "Miss Mamie is

scared to bits of a snake. If she even thought she saw one, she would run away and never come back till she was sure someone had killed it."

"I suppose she is nervous—my mother is nervous about snakes," Sunny Boy announced. "Daddy and I think they are very interesting, but Mother will not even look at them. Except the Fourth of July snakes that come out of those silver papers. She doesn't mind those."

They talked about snakes all the way to Miss Mamie's store, and when they reached the little shop they found Miss Mamie knitting a red and black sweater behind her shining dark counter. She seemed very glad to see them and Sunny Boy bought the thread, for he and Joe always divided the errands they did together.

"I suppose you saw the circus?" said Miss Mamie, as she put the thread into a little paper bag.

"Yes. Wasn't it a good circus?" Sunny Boy answered. "It was a double one, you know."

"I liked it because they didn't have any snake

charmer," said Miss Mamie. "I never go near a circus where there is a snake charmer—ugly, writhing, twisting things—ugh! I can't abide snakes or anyone that handles 'em."

As soon as they were outside, Joe looked triumphantly at Sunny Boy.

"I told you she was afraid of snakes," he said. "It's lucky you didn't have the hose with you—she would have had a fit."

Sunny Boy was glad, too, for he certainly did not want anyone to have a fit. He hoped no one would look behind the counter in the hardware store and see the piece of hose and have a fit.

"You'd better give me the thread—my pockets are larger than yours," Joe suggested, and Sunny Boy gave him the bag.

"The three-ten must be in," said Joe a minute later as a crowd of people came down the street from the direction of the railroad station.

Sunny Boy was staring at a tall, thin man with a brown leather brief case.

"That looks like Judge Layton," he said to

himself. "I do believe it is! He'll be surprised to see me in Hopton."

Sunny Boy knew Judge Layton very well indeed. He had first met him one eventful morning when he went skating with his Grandpa Horton. He was sure the Judge would be pleased to find that Sunny Boy was in Hopton at the same time he was.

"And maybe he saw Daddy somewhere," thought Sunny Boy.

Sunny Boy had had two or three letters from his daddy and mother, and most of the time he was too busy to miss them a great deal. But there were moments, especially if Joe and Marie were a little cross or selfish or when Mrs. Blake took Joe on her lap and called him her boy, when Sunny Boy was homesick. It would be nice, he felt, to speak to Judge Layton and ask him if he had seen Daddy.

"I'll be back in a minute," mumbled Sunny Boy, and away he dashed up the street.

Joe was trying to guess how many packages

of tooth powder were piled in the drugstore window—there was a prize offered for the one who could guess correctly—and he hardly knew that Sunny Boy had gone.

"He turned up that street," Sunny Boy kept saying to himself, as he sped along.

He remembered the street where he had seen the tall man turn, but by the time he reached it there was no one in sight. Sunny Boy stopped running and began to walk. He walked the length of the street, watching carefully to see if Judge Layton could be sitting on any of the porches. But when the street stopped and the fields began, he had not seen anyone at all.

"I guess I'd better go back," said Sunny Boy aloud. "Even if I knew into which house Judge Layton went, maybe it wouldn't be polite to follow him there when I don't know the people," and he gave a little sigh.

He was tired and he thought if he went around the block he might save himself some steps. But he didn't know how the streets in Hopton were

planned, and when he went "around the block" he did not come back to the street he had been following. Instead, he found himself on the outskirts of the town and apparently further from Main Street, where the drugstore was and where he had left Joe, than ever.

Then down the street, with a roar and a rumble and riding in a cloud of dust came a yellow and green jitney, and Sunny Boy immediately decided what to do.

"It goes by the Blake house," he thought, holding up his hand to stop the bus. "I'd better go back and tell Mrs. Blake I'm lost."

Which was a very sensible thing to do and everything would have worked out nicely if the jitney driver had not cried after half an hour's riding:

"End of the line—all out."

Sunny Boy stared about him in amazement. Then, because the driver seemed to expect it, he paid him a nickel and climbed down the steps.

The few people who had been in the jitney

when Sunny Boy entered it had got out one by one along the route, and now the little boy was all alone.

"I wonder where I am?" he said to himself, while the jitney turned around and lumbered back in the direction from which it had come, leaving Sunny Boy gazing after it.

CHAPTER XI

SUNNY BOY MEETS THE CIRCUS

SPAT! Something cold and wet fell on the back of Sunny Boy's hand. Something round and wet struck the dust at his feet.

Spat! Spat! Something cold and wet and round fell on his face as he turned it up toward the sky.

It was raining!

"My goodness," said Sunny Boy aloud. "And I haven't an umbrella!"

When anyone is caught out in the rain he naturally looks for some shelter. Sunny Boy could see no house, but there was a large oak tree a few feet away and the gray dust beneath it looked dry. He ran toward the tree and found that the rain had not come through its thick leaves.

"I must have taken the wrong jitney," thought Sunny Boy. "I don't see where I am, and I must be more lost than I was when I was in Hopton."

As a matter of fact he was. He was "more lost" because in Hopton he at least knew where he was and now he was in the open country and not only did not know where he was, but could not ask anyone to tell him. For miles and miles —as far as he could see—there were no houses and no people.

Sunny Boy had been lost several times before this—once in the subway in New York, once out West, and once in Porto Rico, but there had always been someone to speak to. Now he felt very small and forlorn, standing under a spreading oak tree with the rain falling quietly just outside the green branches that had so far kept him dry.

There was a white fence a few yards behind the tree and something painted on it in large black

letters. Sunny Boy tried to spell out the sign without leaving his safe shelter.

"Buy — your — Easter hats — at T-O-R-R-E-Y'S," he read aloud, working so hard that his tongue stuck out and he forgot he was lost. "One—mile—to—B-I-L-L-I-N-G-S."

There was a little painted hand with one long black finger pointing to show in which direction you walked a mile to come to Billings.

"Why—why—" Sunny Boy stuttered a bit because he had just made an exciting discovery— "Billings is where the circus went. Minnie said so."

Easter was over months ago and there was no actual need for Easter hats, but the sign had not been taken down. Perhaps, Sunny Boy decided, Mr. Torrey had summer hats as well as Easter hats. He, Sunny Boy, didn't want a hat, but he would certainly like to see those elephants again.

As if to make things easier for him, the little shower ended and the sun peeped out. There

was the finger pointing to Billings and all Sunny Boy had to do, to see the elephants, was to walk one mile.

"I'm going," he declared, and the only creature in sight to hear him, a large black beetle, waved its wings approvingly.

One mile may be a short distance if your daddy drives you in the car; it may not seem very long if you are taking a hike after breakfast with a couple of chums to talk to you as you walk; or if you are strolling along, without intending to walk any special distance, a mile may be done before you know it. But it is different when you are one small boy and already tired by a long walk to town earlier in the day.

Sunny Boy was lonesome and the sun was uncomfortably hot. He wanted a drink of water very much. And most of all he wanted someone to talk to him.

He had walked perhaps half a mile—though he was sure it must be three miles and he had been expecting to see the town of Billings at

every step—when a large cloud of dust attracted his attention. It had not rained enough to lay the heavy layer of dust that covered the roads throughout the country, and when Sunny Boy looked ahead and saw the gray cloud rising from the roadway he was sure something was coming.

"Maybe it will be the right jitney, and it will take me back to Joe's house," he thought hopefully.

But, my goodness, it was no jitney at all! In a few moments Sunny Boy saw a camel walking jerkily along and then a zebra and he knew that if he was not coming to the circus at Billings, it was coming to him.

"I wonder where the elephants are," he speculated, trying to walk a little faster and wishing that Joe were with him to enjoy the parade.

Before Sunny Boy reached the cloud of dust the line of animals had halted. Sunny Boy, hurrying toward them, saw the wagons standing still and small groups of people gathered about them. The man who played the organ scrambled up

to the top rail of the fence along the road and sat there, his bear leaning against the fence as though he were glad to rest.

Sunny Boy was so intent on finding the elephants that he forgot to be shy. He looked seriously at the man holding the camel—he was at the head of the "parade" as Sunny Boy insisted on calling this line of march—and the man stared back at him.

"Is this the circus?" asked Sunny Boy politely, thinking that he had better ask questions and save mistakes. Harriet always said if people asked enough questions they would not make mistakes.

"It's called a circus," the man said slowly, "but not by me."

Sunny Boy couldn't puzzle this out and he was sure it was a circus because only a circus had camels and bears and things like that.

"Are you going to Billings?" he inquired next.

"We're coming from there," the man answered.

"But isn't this Whitlock's Gigantic Double Circus?" urged Sunny Boy. "We saw Whitlock's Gigantic Double Circus in Hopton yesterday and Minnie said it would be in Billings this afternoon."

The man jerked the camel's head around to one side, so that it could not bite him.

"I haven't the pleasure of Minnie's acquaintance," he said almost crossly. "But the next time you see her, tell her from me that she made a mistake. The Gigantic Double Circus isn't going to be in Billings this afternoon—or any other afternoon as far as I know."

"Oh!" said Sunny Boy, rather uncertainly.

The camel kept jerking its head up and down, and the man suddenly led it to one side of the road and sat down under a tree, still keeping the rope that was tied around the animal's neck twisted about his arm.

As he didn't say anything more, Sunny Boy thought that perhaps he did not wish to talk, so he walked on, wondering why all the wagons

were waiting. In a few moments he discovered what was holding back the circus—a piece of harness had broken and the three horses that pulled the big tent wagon were standing dejectedly in the road while some of the circus men looked at the harness and argued about how it could be mended.

The horses' heads were drooping as though they felt themselves to blame for the delay. Of course they couldn't help it if the harness broke—but it seemed to Sunny Boy that no one seemed very merry. He had supposed that a circus had "fun" all the time. He and Joe had very nearly decided to belong to a circus when they grew up and ride on elephants instead of street cars or jitneys. And Marie had declared that she meant to play in the band.

"But no one is riding an elephant, and no one is laughing," thought Sunny Boy to himself. "I wonder where the clown is—he ought to make folks laugh when the circus breaks down."

But Sunny Boy could see no one that looked

like the clown, and as he stood at one side and watched the men working over the straps and buckles he thought they looked very serious.

"There, you might know it—another strap has rotted out!" said one of the men. "Everything's falling to pieces, even the harness. When we can't get it to hold together another day with ropes and twine, perhaps old Whitlock will buy some new leather, but not before."

"Got a knife?" asked another man. "I think I can punch some holes in this and make it do. Look at the little shaver—wonder where he came from?"

They all turned and stared at Sunny Boy.

"Live around here, Son?" asked the man who was punching holes in a leather strap with his knife.

Sunny Boy shook his head.

"I live back there," he said, pointing down the road. "That is, Joe Blake does. I live in Centronia."

"We had two days there last year," another

man said. "If you've run away to join the circus, Bub, take my advice and don't."

"Not this circus," the man with the knife added.

Sunny Boy pressed closer.

"I didn't run away," he said earnestly. "I went to Hopton and I thought I saw Judge Layton and when I followed him I couldn't find Joe. Why isn't this a good circus to join?"

The man who was making holes with his knife laughed.

"Well, mainly because we never know where the next meal is coming from or whether there will be any next meal," he said. "Amos is in debt up to his neck. We couldn't raise the tent in Billings because the license fee wasn't paid. And the license fee wasn't paid because Amos didn't have the money—or said he didn't have it —to pay with."

Sunny Boy hoped he wasn't asking too many questions. He was so deeply interested and now was his chance to find out all about circuses. He

forgot that he was lost, forgot to wonder what the Blakes would think, forgot everything except that here he was, Sunny Boy Horton, actually talking to real live circus people.

"Who is Amos and what is a license fee and where are you going after you get the harness mended?" he asked.

The man with the knife didn't seem to mind answering all these questions.

"Amos is Amos Whitlock—the man who owns the circus, Son," he replied kindly. "And the license fee is paid to the town where we set up to give a show—same as folks pay a license fee to run their automobiles, you know."

Sunny Boy knew about automobile licenses and nodded.

"And when we get this harness mended—if we ever do," the man went on, "we're going to Claudgate. That's a town about six miles west of Hopton."

It had been getting darker and now the spattering rain drops began again.

"You might know!" the man who was helping to mend the harness grumbled. "You might know it would rain! I suppose we'll plod along through six inches of mud to-night and when we get stuck find that Amos left the chain back in Billings. Perhaps he expects the elephants to pull us out by their trunks."

"I know what they do—they pull the wagons out of the mud!" cried Sunny Boy eagerly, heedless of the rain which was now falling steadily. "I saw a picture once! I wish you'd get stuck and let me see the elephants pull you out."

"Well, my guess is that it looks better in picture books," the man who was mending the harness answered. "And if you take my advice, Son, you'll crawl into that tent wagon out of this wet. We can set you down at the Hopton cross-roads and that will save you a little walk. You can find your way home from there, can't you?"

Sunny Boy thought he could—though he didn't know where the Hopton cross-roads were —and he was glad to climb into the wagon out

of the rain. The rolls of canvas reminded him of the way his mother and Harriet rolled up the rugs in the house when it was time to go to the seashore for the summer. Sunny Boy wondered, as he settled himself comfortably between two long rolls, where his mother and his daddy were at that moment and whether they were thinking of him. He hoped the old soldier would get into the Soldiers' Home and like it after he was there.

Just a minute or two later—Sunny Boy was sure it wasn't longer than that—he sat up with a jerk. The wagon was moving slowly and steadily and creaking as the wheels turned. It was dark—Sunny Boy didn't see how it could be dark—and a lighted lantern was swaying crazily against one side of the wagon. Under the lantern sat a man at whom Sunny Boy stared, much puzzled.

Where had he seen this man before?

"Did they get the harness mended?" asked

Sunny Boy, wishing he could remember the man's name.

The man grinned, a queer little grin that twisted his mouth sideways. He was fat, but he wasn't cheerful. Sunny Boy had heard someone say that fat people were always cheerful.

"Sure the harness is mended," said the fat man. "We've been travelling for a couple of hours now."

Then Sunny Boy knew that he must have been asleep, because if he had been awake he would have known when the wagon started to move.

"Have—have we come to the Hopton cross-roads yet?" Sunny Boy asked, wishing that the man would tell him something and not wait to be asked questions.

"Passed it an hour ago," said the man.

CHAPTER XII

STRANGE ADVENTURES

SUNNY BOY scrambled over the tent rolls and stood up, clinging to a rope at the back of the wagon, to steady himself.

"But I had to get off there!" he protested. "Mr.—the man who was mending the harness, said I could get off there and walk to Joe's house. Mrs. Blake will wonder where I am."

The wagon went into a rut that made Sunny Boy stumble and the lantern bounce up and down crazily.

"Lovely roads," said the fat man, who had not moved since Sunny Boy had first seen him. "Don't get excited. Lie down and go to sleep again. I'll call you for breakfast."

He snapped his fingers and suddenly Sunny Boy knew who he was.

"You're the clown!" he cried. "Then your face isn't white all the time, is it?"

"No, my face isn't white all the time," said the clown crossly. "And I wasn't brought up to talk all the time, either. Why can't you go to sleep and keep still?"

Sunny Boy peered out of the back of the wagon. It was pitch dark and raining in torrents. Though he did not know it, he had been asleep almost five hours, and it was nearly ten o'clock.

"I can't go to sleep. I hope you don't mind," he said politely. "But you see I have to get back to Hopton. Do you think I can walk back from Claudgate?"

The clown took a piece of wood out of his pocket and began to whittle.

"Never heard of Claudgate," was his answer.

Sunny Boy sat down again. He was puzzled.

"The man who was mending the harness said we were going to Claudgate—that is, he said the

circus was," Sunny Boy explained. "He said it was six miles south of Hopton—no, he said east. Maybe it was west, come to think of it," he added, anxious to make the clown understand.

"Oh, well, Amos changed the plans," said the clown, whittling a sharp point on his stick. "We *were* going to Claudgate, I believe—at least, there was some talk of it. But now we're going right on through till we come to Woodtown, and show there."

"I don't suppose I could get off now and walk?" Sunny Boy suggested.

"You might get off and swim," said the clown. "But if you'll take my advice, you'll lie down and go to sleep."

And as poor Sunny Boy could not very well jump off the moving wagon into a wet, dark road and hope to find his way home that night, there didn't seem to be anything else for him to do. He was hungry—he had had nothing to eat since lunch—but he did not feel like asking the clown for anything to eat.

"I should think a clown would laugh and tell jokes," thought Sunny Boy, curling up between the two tent rolls again and watching the lantern as it bumped and swayed. "But this one doesn't tell any funny jokes at all."

In a few minutes Sunny Boy had fallen fast asleep and he never knew how many weary hours the circus wagon and the tired circus folk and animals plodded through the rain that dreary night. When he woke, the sun was shining and the creaking of the wagon wheels had stopped.

"Is that bacon done yet?" Sunny Boy heard someone say.

He had not remembered where he was when he first woke up, but now, when he smelled bacon frying and realized how very hungry he was, he knew that he was not in Joe Blake's house, but with the Gigantic Double Circus.

He scrambled to his feet and thrust his tousled little head out between the canvas curtains that covered the back of the wagon.

"Well, kindly look at young Prince what-do-

you-call-him!" said a man who was dressed in a white cap and apron and who was frying bacon over a small fire. "Why didn't someone tell me we were going to have guests for breakfast?"

Sunny Boy blushed as a number of people turned to stare at him.

"Why, that's that lost kid," the man who had been mending the harness the day before spoke up. "Hey, Son, didn't you jump down at the cross-roads? I told you to!"

Before Sunny Boy could explain that he had been asleep and did not know when they passed the cross-roads, someone touched the harness man on the arm.

"Amos said to let him sleep," said the man in a low tone, but Sunny Boy heard him.

He knew the man, too—that is, he knew that he had seen him before. He was the man who had put the elephants through their tricks and had said he was glad to hear Sunny Boy had enjoyed the circus.

"Come eat some breakfast, Bub," called the cook kindly.

The elephant man came over to the wagon and smiled at Sunny Boy.

"I'll show you where you can wash your face," he said. "Then we'll have breakfast. Do you think you'd like to be a circus boy?"

Sunny Boy was sure he wouldn't like it, but it did not seem polite to say so, so he said nothing. Instead he followed the elephant man into a small tent where there was water and a wash basin and some towels. Sunny Boy washed his face and hands and smoothed his hair with a little comb his new friend handed to him.

"My name's Jake," said the elephant man. "What is yours?"

"Sunny Boy Horton," Sunny Boy answered. "I'm really named Arthur Bradford Horton, for my grandpa, but no one ever calls me that."

"No, it's too long a name to use every day," said Jake. "Well, let's go see what they have for breakfast."

Sunny Boy trotted along beside the elephant man, feeling as though he must be dreaming. He didn't even know where he was, but he could see that the circus had stopped in a big field and that there were woods on one side of it. The horses had been unhitched from the wagons and were tied to the fence. A group were standing around the stove and the cook, eating breakfast as though they were at a picnic. Sunny Boy saw several holding rolls in their hands.

"Bacon for two," said the elephant man, and the cook put two slices of hot bacon in a roll and handed it to Sunny Boy and gave another to his new friend.

Sunny Boy had probably never been so hungry before in his life. Certainly, no breakfast at home had ever tasted so good, and when he had eaten one roll, the cook gave him another.

"Who is he?" someone whispered to the elephant man, as Sunny Boy bit into his second roll. "Where did you get him, Jake?"

"I didn't get him," the elephant man replied,

lowering his voice, though Sunny Boy still could hear him. "He's a kid who crawled into the tent wagon and went to sleep. I hear that Amos wants to see him when he gets back this morning."

Sunny Boy finished his roll and then decided that if he was to walk to Hopton he ought to start as soon as possible. He wished that someone would offer to lend him the pony, or even the zebra. He was sure that Mr. Blake would see that any borrowed animal was returned to the circus as soon as Sunny Boy had safely returned to Hopton. But he didn't like to ask the circus people to lend him the pony.

"I think I'd better be going now," said Sunny Boy bravely, touching the elephant man on the sleeve to attract his attention. "Mrs. Blake will wonder where I am and Joe has my piece of rubber I play elephant's trunk with. That is, he has it, if he went back to the store and got it. I'm much obliged for the breakfast. I hope

your circus comes to Centronia next year. We'll all come to see it."

Jake, the elephant man, patted Sunny Boy's head.

"Don't you be in too great a hurry to walk," he said. "Mr. Whitlock was asking to see you. He went over to the nearest town an hour ago and it's my belief he was telephoning your folks not to worry. Likely as not he'll send you home in a wagon—or perhaps you can ride the elephant!"

Sunny Boy rather fancied the idea of arriving back at the Blake house astride an elephant. He could picture how the family would come out to stare at him. But then he remembered that elephants move very slowly and perhaps it would take him too long to make the trip that way.

He sat down on an overturned bucket to wait for Mr. Whitlock, and there were so many interesting things to watch that the time passed very quickly. The men were feeding the animals and the master of the dancing bear brushed and

combed him while Sunny Boy watched, exactly as one would brush and comb a large and shaggy dog. The little pony was rolling under a tree, waving his four legs in the air. Sunny Boy could not help wishing that Joe and Marie were with him—and Nelson and Ruth Baker. He knew dozens of children who would be delighted to see the circus animals when they were not in the ring.

"Hey, Bub, you come along with me," said the fat clown, coming up to Sunny Boy suddenly.

"It's all right. He'll take you to see Mr. Whitlock, Sunny Boy," the elephant man called kindly.

Sunny Boy had hoped that Jake would take him to see the owner of the circus, but he followed the clown obediently. They passed a number of small tents and in one of them Sunny Boy saw a woman darning stockings, just as his mother at home darned stockings, with a big mending basket beside her. Sunny Boy had

never thought of anyone in the circus doing anything his own mother did.

The clown led Sunny Boy up to a yellow tent with the curtain flaps tied back as far as they would go. In the tent was a folding table, open, and covered with papers. Seated before this table on a camp chair was a large man with heavy black eyebrows and a rather frowning face.

"Here's the boy, Amos," said the clown, pushing Sunny Boy forward.

"Well, young man, what have you got to say for yourself, stowing away in my circus?" boomed the big man, who Sunny Boy knew must be Mr. Whitlock.

Now Sunny Boy knew all about stowaways. He had seen a real stowaway when he sailed on the *Santa Maria* to Porto Rico and, coming home, he had played stowaway with other children on the ship.

"I didn't stow away in your circus," he said, trying hard to speak politely. "The man who

was mending harness said to get in the wagon and I could get out at the Hopton cross-roads and go home. But I went to sleep and no one woke me up. A stowaway is a boy who hides without telling anyone."

Mr. Whitlock opened and shut a knife he had taken from his pocket. He seemed to like to hear the noise the blades made as they clicked.

"So that's what a stowaway is, is it?" he said. "Well, of course we have to see about getting you back. But I've made arrangements for the circus to be in Reddington to-morrow, and that means we'll have to pull up stakes at noon. I wonder if you know how to ride?"

"I can almost ride a bicycle," Sunny Boy told him.

"That spangled suit Danny left would just about fit him," said the clown suddenly. "I'll try it on him, if you give the word, Amos."

Sunny Boy looked from one to the other, puzzled.

"I couldn't get any kind of a boy in town,"

said Mr. Whitlock. "This one may do in a pinch. All right, Ben, see if the suit fits him and let me know."

"Come on," the clown ordered Sunny Boy, who backed out of the tent hurriedly.

"Is the circus going to Hopton?" he asked, running to keep up with the clown who took long strides as he walked.

"Don't ask so many questions," said the clown crossly.

CHAPTER XIII

PRINCESS FLORA

SUNNY BOY could not get used to the way this clown acted and talked. By rights, he should have been jolly and full of fun.

Sunny Boy had always imagined that clowns did not walk like other folk, but turned handsprings whenever they wished to go anywhere and were up to tricks every minute. Instead, this clown hardly laughed at all and he sounded as though he were grumbling to himself every time he spoke.

He took Sunny Boy into another tent and told him to sit down on a trunk while he hunted up a suit for him to wear. Sunny Boy already wore a suit, but he didn't say anything. He sat down and waited patiently while the clown rummaged through a large wooden box.

"Here it is!" Ben said at last, holding up a pair of long trousers and a jacket, both made of some kind of bright red material and covered with little gold spangles.

Sunny Boy stared. He had never worn a suit like that.

"Stand up and let me try this on you," ordered the clown, who certainly did not try extra hard to be polite.

The suit fitted Sunny Boy, and the clown seemed to be much pleased.

"Well, he's the right size, at any rate," said a voice behind them, and Sunny Boy turned suddenly to see Mr. Whitlock standing at the opening of the tent.

"I've been thinking about you, Son," Mr. Whitlock said seriously, "and I'm going to take you home. But I can't do it right straight off, for the circus is booked ahead. You know yourself it would never do to disappoint the hundreds of boys and girls of your age who are expecting the Gigantic Double Circus to come and

show in their town. You wouldn't want to be disappointed like that, would you?"

Sunny Boy, in the scarlet spangled suit, shook his head. He didn't see, though, why all the girls and boys would have to be disappointed if he went home.

"I'm planning to get you back to your folks as soon as I can, but I also have to do my duty by those other boys and girls," went on Mr. Whitlock. "So we'll have to travel a bit before we come back to Hopton. And of course a lad like you doesn't want to be idle all the time. You'd like to make yourself useful, wouldn't you?"

Sunny Boy nodded. He was feeling so queer that he didn't dare speak. He was afraid he might cry, and suppose he should spot that beautiful red suit?

"Just you do as Ben here tells you to do and you'll be all right," said Mr. Whitlock. "There was a boy, just your size, used to ride the pony bareback and do stunts in the ring. You might

practice a bit and help us out in that way. Limbering up your muscles will be good for you."

He turned and went away and the clown helped Sunny Boy to get out of the red suit.

"That's all just now," he said, more kindly than he had spoken yet. "Run along and amuse yourself. The wagons will be starting right after dinner. To-morrow morning I'll begin to drill you."

Sunny Boy wandered out of the tent and was trying to decide where to go when he passed the tent where the woman was mending stockings again.

"Hello!" she called to him brightly. "Whose little boy are you? Don't you want to come in and get acquainted?"

Sunny Boy stepped inside the tent and found it was like a cheerful little room. There was a table and a couple of folding camp chairs and a trunk that had a chintz cover over it so that it looked like a box seat. Sunny Boy knew it was a trunk, though, because one end of the

cover had caught and was turned back to show the handle at the end.

He stooped down to put the cover straight, noticing as he did so the cat that was curled up in one corner of the tent, the little green rug in the center, and the pot of trailing green vine that stood on a suitcase turned up to make a stand for it.

"Thank you," said the owner of the trunk when she saw Sunny Boy straighten the cover. "I know you're the kind of boy who helps his mother. I'm Princess Flora. Wouldn't you like to tell me your name?"

"Sunny Boy Horton," Sunny Boy answered, a little shyly. "Are you a real princess?"

Princess Flora laughed as she chose another stocking from the bag.

"I'm a real princess—not a fairy princess," she told him. "That is one of my names—Princess Flora. My other name is Mrs. Cooney."

"Oh, yes, I know!" exclaimed Sunny Boy. "I

have another name, too—Arthur Bradford Horton. But no one ever says it."

In the next five minutes Sunny Boy and Princess Flora became very good friends indeed. He told her how he happened to be with the circus and about his daddy and mother and the Blake family who would not know where he was.

And Princess Flora told Sunny Boy that she rode the horses in the circus ring. When she said that, Sunny Boy remembered her and that she had been riding when the bridle broke and had to be mended that day in Hopton. She told him, too, that she had been with a circus —not Whitlock's, but some circus—ever since she was a little girl.

"I suppose that is the reason I stick to this outfit," she said, threading her needle and picking up her sewing—she had been too interested in talking to Sunny Boy, to sew steadily. "This isn't much of a circus now, though it was a fine one in its day. I ought to retire and be an old lady and keep house for Jake. But some-

how I can't bear to leave the sawdust ring."

"I think this is a nice circus," said Sunny Boy, wondering who Jake was. "The clown said there used to be a boy in it like me—his name was Danny."

"Yes, Danny ran away over a month ago," Princess Flora answered. "He didn't want to be an acrobat. He wanted to live on a farm and raise fine seed potatoes. He got the idea from a book, and though Amos spent two years training him, the first chance he had, Danny ran off."

"My grandpa has a farm," said Sunny Boy.

He told Princess Flora—he thought it was a prettier name than Mrs. Cooney, and she agreed with him—about his Grandpa Horton's farm, and before he had finished it was time for lunch.

The cook banged loudly on a frying pan and the circus troupe gathered around his stove. Sunny Boy found out afterward that when they expected to stay a few days in one place they set up a table in a tent, but they ate as quickly

as they could when it was time to load the wagons and break camp.

"Well, I suppose you're all set to go home," said Jake, the elephant man, to Sunny Boy as soon as he saw him.

Sunny Boy had a little tin mug of soup in his hand and the cup handle was getting hotter by the minute. He didn't know what to do with it, for he had a sandwich in his other hand.

"Put it down here on this board," said Jake, hastily sweeping some leaves off a plank on the ground. "There, that's better. When are you going?"

Sunny Boy shook his head sadly.

"I can't go right away, because Mr. Whitlock has to show the circus to a lot of boys and girls," he explained. "They'd be disappointed if they didn't see the elephants and things. But after that, I guess he is going to take me back to Joe's house."

"Amos is looking after that kid, and don't you go to putting ideas into his head," the clown

growled suddenly, coming up with his mug of soup in his hand.

He took a hasty swallow and evidently burned his tongue.

"Some people are forever bothering with what doesn't concern 'em," he scolded. "Sunny Boy, you get into that wagon and stay there till it is time to go. I can't be hunting all over the place for you at the last minute."

Sunny Boy obediently climbed into the back of the tent wagon and sat down on the canvas rolls to finish his lunch. He wished that he was back with the Blakes, or, better yet, safely in his own home in Centronia. Two tears rolled down his cheeks and he was feeling very lonely and unhappy when he saw a man leading two horses.

"I'll bet he's going to hitch them to this wagon," thought Sunny Boy, scrambling excitedly toward the front of the wagon.

He had guessed right, and the man was already backing the horses up to the pole when Sunny Boy climbed into the high seat.

"Hello! You're not going to be left, are you?" the man called cheerfully. "Well, I declare if it isn't little hop-toad!"

It was the man Sunny Boy had seen mending the harness in the road the day before and he was glad to see him again, even if he did call him names.

"I am not a hop-toad," said Sunny Boy with dignity.

"No, of course not. But didn't you say you came from some place with a name like that?" the man replied, buckling straps and traces as he talked.

"I said Hopton." Sunny Boy repeated distinctly.

"I knew there was a hop in it," the man declared. "Have you joined the circus?"

"No-o, I don't think so," Sunny Boy replied. "I can't go home right away, because other boys and girls have to see the elephants. Could I help you harness those horses?"

"All through, thanks," said the man. "You

should have asked to be set down at the cross-roads as I told you. Rolling around with a circus is no job for a lad of your age."

Sunny Boy kept still because he was afraid the man was scolding. Whatever the Gigantic Double Circus was, it certainly was not a cheerful circus. So far everyone he had talked to, with the exception of the Princess Flora and Jake, the elephant man, had been cross to him.

"My name's Hank. What's yours?" asked the man suddenly.

That was apparently the way people became acquainted in the circus.

"I'm Sunny Boy," said that small person sedately. "Oh, are you going to drive the wagon? Could I sit up here with you?"

"Stay right where you are and we'll voyage together," Hank answered, climbing up beside Sunny Boy and taking the reins.

In another twenty minutes the entire circus was ready to go and the procession started. Sunny Boy glanced back in the wagon and saw

the fat clown sitting under the swaying lantern as he had the night before, only now, of course, the lantern was not lighted. Sunny Boy was half afraid he would make him come down from the high seat and ride inside the wagon, but he said nothing.

The drive was long and tedious and after the first few miles Sunny Boy did not find it at all exciting. They could not drive faster than a walk, because the elephants and other animals must not be hurried. Then, too, the wagons were heavily loaded and the patient horses could not be expected to trot and pull them too.

Sunny Boy finally went to sleep, leaning against Hank and only woke up when the circus halted for a hasty supper along the road. After he had eaten, Sunny Boy talked a little while to Hank, but his eyes soon closed again and he never knew when he was lifted down and put between two rolls of canvas where he slept snugly till the shouts of the drivers awakened him the next morning.

And then the procession started

The circus had reached Reddington and they were already putting up the big tent for the afternoon performance. It was early in the morning, barely half-past five, but a few people stood around, watching.

"You get some breakfast and then I want you to put on that suit and let me see you on a pony," said the clown, appearing from around the corner of the wagon with the spangled red suit over one arm and a buttered roll and a cup of hot coffee for Sunny Boy in his hands.

"My mother doesn't let me drink coffee," Sunny Boy declared firmly. "She says it isn't good for children."

"I'll drink it for you then," the clown answered, and he did, though it was scalding hot.

CHAPTER XIV

CIRCUS DAYS

AS soon as Sunny Boy had finished his roll the clown handed him the red suit and he put it on. The pretty little pony that he remembered having seen when he and Marie and Joe were looking at the animals with Mr. Blake—how long ago that seemed!—was brought around and the clown lifted Sunny Boy into the saddle.

"Hey, Amos," he called loudly, "you'd better come watch this."

Not only Mr. Whitlock came, but half a dozen other men, and Sunny Boy felt very queer to have so many strange eyes staring at him. It would have been easier if he had known how to ride a pony, but he didn't. Not a circus pony—he was sure of that!

And before the clown was ready to lift him

down from the saddle, poor Sunny Boy was ready to declare that he probably never would know how to ride. For Mr. Whitlock expected him to be like Danny, the boy whose suit he wore, and Danny, it seemed, had been an acrobat.

The pony was perfectly trained and stood absolutely still while Sunny Boy, at the directions of the clown, stood on one foot on the saddle and balanced himself. Then he had to kneel down and pretend he was riding that way. Finally he was told to jump over the pony's head and through a large hoop the clown held up in front of him. It looked like a long jump, but Sunny Boy did his best and went through the hoop safely.

"I think he'll do," said Mr. Whitlock to the clown. "See that he gets an hour's practice every morning and again in the afternoon."

Then began for Sunny Boy long strange days that he was never able to decide whether he liked or not. There were some things about living with a circus that he liked very much indeed. He liked

talking to Princess Flora and to Jake, the elephant man, who was, he found out, a nephew of Mrs. Cooney's. And Sunny Boy liked to hear the older men in the circus tell stories as they worked among the animals of the exciting times they remembered. These stories were mostly about the days when the Whitlock circus was one of the largest of its kind—Amos Whitlock's father had been the owner then—and adventures had not been lacking. Sunny Boy's favorite story was one about a great fire that had burned the largest tent and of how the animals had fled, frightened, and of the trouble it had been to capture them and get them back into their cages.

Sunny Boy liked to watch the afternoon performances, too, and he enjoyed seeing the new towns at which the circus stopped. He usually fell asleep before the evening shows were over, and likely as not Princess Flora would put him to bed without waking him.

But he grew very tired of the long, tedious trips the circus had to make between the towns.

They seldom stayed longer than one night in any place, and sometimes when they reached a town Mr. Whitlock would have trouble again about the license fee and they would go on to the next place without stopping to put up the tents.

Sunny Boy was homesick, too. He kept thinking about his daddy and his mother and wondering whether the Blakes had written to them that their Sunny Boy was lost. Daddy and Mother would be anxious about him, he knew. As for Harriet, she would feel like starting out at once to look for him. Why, if he was ten minutes late coming home from school at noon, Harriet would be out at the corner of the street, looking for him and calling to him to hurry before the muffins were cold. Yes, Harriet would certainly want to come to find him, but she would never think of looking in a circus for the missing Sunny Boy.

"I shouldn't wonder if we'd go back to Hopton pretty soon," he said to Jake one afternoon, as they were practising dancing behind the cook tent.

That was another thing that Sunny Boy didn't like. Every morning and every afternoon the clown made him practise different exercises. Sometimes he was on the pony and sometimes he was not. He had to bend and bow and twist, to make his muscles supple and strong, and he had to try to ride the pony without touching the reins. Then he was also supposed to do a little dance with the pony and it was this that Jake was helping him to learn.

The elephant man would play on the mouth organ and Sunny Boy would practise his steps. The pony didn't have to practise—he knew his steps by heart.

"How long have you been with us now?" said Jake, taking the harmonica out of his mouth to rest himself a few moments. "Nearly two weeks, haven't you? Yes, I remember it was around the fifteenth when you first showed up and now it is close to the end of the month."

"Mr. Whitlock said as soon as the other boys

and girls had seen the circus he would take me home," Sunny Boy declared.

"Well, I'd give something to know just what Amos does think," said the elephant man a little crossly. "For all I know, he may have some hazy notion in the back of his head about taking you home, and then again—"

Sunny Boy waited anxiously. He wanted to hear more about what Mr. Whitlock might be thinking. But Jake suddenly rose to his feet and shot off across the field. Several other men began to run in the same direction, and Sunny Boy ran too. He couldn't gallop as fast as those who had longer legs, and by the time he reached the place where a small crowd had gathered, whatever had happened was over.

"That's once you got what was coming to you," Sunny Boy heard Hank say, and he was laughing.

Sunny Boy pressed closer to the driver and tried to see between him and Amos Whitlock, who was also looking on.

Then the little group parted and Sunny Boy saw the clown on the ground. He had evidently fallen into the watering trough kept for the horses and then rolled from that to the muddy ground. He was sitting up and holding his face with both hands.

"What happened to him?" asked Sunny Boy.

Hank and Sunny Boy were very good friends by this time and Sunny Boy often rode on the seat of the tent wagon when Hank was driving. Now the driver took Sunny Boy by the hand and began to walk slowly across the field with him.

"There's no use in talking where all the world can hear us," said Hank. "Jake saw Ben, the clown, teasing one of Princess Flora's horses. Flora has been having trouble lately with her horses in the ring, and this explains it. Ben has been riling them so their nerves are on edge when they begin their act."

"And Jake ran up to him and knocked him down?" Sunny Boy asked excitedly.

"Something like that," replied Hank. "He sent him spinning into the watering trough. In a way, Jake is foolish, because it means he'll lose his job."

Sunny Boy looked aghast.

"You mean Jake will go away?" he said, and the tears came into his eyes.

"Well, Amos has a cousin who wants to ride bareback and she is only waiting to take Flora's place," Hank answered. "And Ben has a younger brother who yearns to try his hand at managing elephants. That's what ails this circus. It's running into the ground so fast there won't be any tail left by another season simply because Amos is wild to have money and listens to everyone who has a relative who will work for next to nothing."

Sunny Boy hardly heard him. He was thinking about Jake. If Jake left, the Princess Flora would leave, too. She was his aunt and she wanted to settle down and keep house for him. She often said so. Without Jake and Princess

Flora what a dreadful place the Gigantic Double Circus was going to be for poor Sunny Boy!

He left Hank at the door of the cook tent—the cook was eager to hear about the quarrel—and went in search of Jake. He was pretty sure he knew where to find him—in his aunt's tent. Sure enough, there he was, talking to Princess Flora. It was morning and there would be no performance till that afternoon.

"Jake, are you going to leave the circus?" asked Sunny Boy directly, and his voice trembled.

"I sure am! Want to come along?" said the elephant man, with his kindly smile.

"Don't do that, Jake," Princess Flora cautioned quietly. "Because we are leaving we must not interfere with any plans of Amos's. For all we know, he has a claim on this child."

"Could I go with you?" asked Sunny Boy eagerly.

"We're not going yet—not till we reach Waterville," Princess Flora explained. "That's

my old home and I still own a little farm there. Jake and I will stay on the place till we find out what we want to do."

"But who will take care of the horses and the elephants?" demanded Sunny Boy.

"The horses are mine and go with me," said Princess Flora. "And the elephants will have to get used to another trainer."

Sunny Boy saw that they had a good deal to talk over together, so he left the tent and wandered off forlornly to sit down under a large tree. It did seem to him that he could never stay with the circus after his two friends had left it. They were the only ones who were always kind to him and never scolded him. Even Hank sometimes scolded. Once, when he had been so homesick for Daddy and Mother that he had had to cry, Princess Flora had heard him in the night and had come into his tent and wrapped him up in a blanket and taken him back to her own tent where he had cried as long as he wanted to on her lap and felt much better. She never told any-

one, either. Sunny Boy had been grateful for that—he didn't often cry, and he certainly did not want the circus people to know when he did.

"I could run away," said Sunny Boy to himself. "I could run away at the next place we stop and then perhaps I could find Princess Flora's farm and hide in the cellar. After the circus was gone she and Jake wouldn't care if I stayed with them."

The more Sunny Boy thought about this, the better he liked the plan. He began to save little scraps of food and put them into an empty box he found.

The circus started for the next town as soon as the evening performance was over and Sunny Boy learned, by asking questions from Hank, that Glover, which was the next stop, was only a dozen miles from Waterville.

"I could walk a dozen miles! I know I could!" thought Sunny Boy at breakfast the next morning, putting a roll inside his blouse to be saved for his precious box.

Of course he wouldn't think of trying to run away in the daytime. He waited till night. At first he thought he wasn't going to have a chance to run anywhere, for Ben, the clown, told him at supper-time that it had been decided that he and the pony were to go through their little act for the first time in the ring that evening.

"Amos says if you've been practising as much as you should, you know enough to do Danny's tricks now," said the clown.

Sunny Boy felt prickles run down his back at the thought of getting out in the sawdust ring with hundreds of people staring at him. He couldn't finish his supper, but he wasn't so frightened that he forgot to save some of the food. He was sure he would be hungry before he found Princess Flora's farm.

However, Sunny Boy didn't have to dance in the ring with the pony. As he came out of his tent after hiding the biscuits he had saved in his box, the clown clutched him by the shoulder.

"Amos says for you to go into your tent and

stay there," the clown ordered him crossly. "He doesn't want you fooling around with the crowd. You'd better do as he says, for he's in a great temper."

Sunny Boy went back in the tent and picked up his box. That was all he had to carry with him, for he had no baggage of any kind. He thought it was funny that Mr. Whitlock should have changed his mind about having him ride the pony, but he was glad it had happened that way.

As soon as he heard the band begin to play for the opening march Sunny Boy crept out of his tent and scooted through the darkness, intending to cross the field and find the road.

Just as he reached the shadowy posts that marked the boundary of the circus lot, a heavy hand grasped his arm.

"Thought you'd be smarter than Amos Whitlock, eh?" said a voice that Sunny Boy recognized as belonging to the owner of the circus.

CHAPTER XV

A FRIEND IN NEED

SUNNY BOY gulped, then gave a little cry as iron fingers pinched his elbow.

"Keep still!" growled Mr. Whitlock in a fierce whisper. "Don't let me hear a peep from you!"

He wheeled Sunny Boy around and marched him back across the field so roughly that several times poor Sunny Boy stumbled and tripped over roots and stones. He would have fallen except that the grip on his elbow held him up.

"After all I've done for you, you ought to be ashamed to try to sneak off like this," Mr. Whitlock scolded a little breathlessly, for he wasn't used to walking fast.

He stopped before a wagon and, still holding Sunny Boy by the arm, he took a bunch of keys out of his pocket.

"Now you get in there and stay till you've had time to think over how you've acted," he said, suddenly lifting Sunny Boy up and thrusting him into the inky blackness.

Sunny Boy heard a wooden door close and the snap of a padlock as the latch clicked. He knew he was alone and locked in, but he didn't know what kind of a place he was in.

He felt around the walls with both hands. They were solid wood. Not a ray of light came in a crack anywhere. Sunny Boy's lunch box, which he had put in his blouse, fell to the floor with a clatter and made him jump. He found the door and tried it softly—it was tightly locked.

Then Sunny Boy sat down and cried, and so would any lad have done in his position. Here he was locked up, and for all he knew he would be kept locked up for weeks and weeks to come. Princess Flora and Jake would go away and he would never know when the circus came to Waterville.

Sunny Boy cried so hard that he made him-

self sleepy. He must have dozed, with his head against the wall, for he was dreaming that Harriet was knocking on the kitchen door at home and saying softly:

"Sunny Boy, are you there? Sunny Boy, are you there?"

Sunny Boy lifted his head. His neck hurt, because he had been holding it in a crooked position.

Someone was rattling the door softly and calling:

"Sunny Boy! Sunny Boy, are you there?"

"Jake!" cried Sunny Boy joyfully. "Jake, is that you? Will you let me out?"

"Sh—don't talk so loud," the whisper came back. "I can't let you out. Amos has the key and the padlock is new so I can't break it. But I want to tell you something. Can you hear me?"

Sunny Boy could tell where the door was because a little stream of fresh air blew in at one side. He pressed his face close to this and he

could hear the elephant man very plainly.

"The reason Amos changed his mind and didn't have you ride the pony to-night," said Jake, "is because he saw posters in the town this afternoon offering a reward for you. Your father is hunting for you."

"Oh-h!" breathed Sunny Boy. "Did you see Daddy?"

He heard Jake give a little chuckle.

"No, I didn't. And as I was with Amos, I couldn't say a word," answered Jake. "I let on I didn't notice the sign. But I'm leaving to-night—without telling anyone—and I mean to take one of these posters with me and read the directions. I'll get in touch with your father some way. You'll be all right."

"Can't I go with you?" begged Sunny Boy. "Take me with you, Jake!"

"Can't be done, Sunny Boy," Jake said patiently. "I can't get you out of here in the first place. You're in one of the baggage wagons and the walls are heavily boarded and the top is

wire with canvas over it. You stay with the outfit and it won't be any longer than two days—maybe not that long—before your daddy finds you."

Sunny Boy, when he understood that Jake really couldn't get him out of the wagon very sensibly said he would wait quietly.

"Where's Princess Flora?" he whispered.

"She is going on to Waterville with the circus," Jake explained. "I'll turn up there later, but just now I want to get away and put several miles between me and Amos before morning. You sit tight, Sunny Boy, and you'll come out of your troubles right side up with care."

"I *am* sitting tight," declared Sunny Boy, who really was huddled up like a little round ball against the crack through which he and Jake were whispering.

"Well, go to sleep and don't let on you know anything about me," Jake whispered once more. "Good-bye, Sunny Boy. Perhaps I'll see you again sometime."

"Good-bye," said Sunny Boy earnestly. "I hope you'll like it on the farm in Waterville."

He couldn't hear Jake go away, but he knew he had gone and he might have felt lonelier than ever if he had not gone to sleep almost at once. The motion of the wagon awoke him and for a few minutes Sunny Boy did not know where he was. Then he remembered.

"I suppose we're going to Waterville," he thought. "I wish I had something soft to sit on. These boards jounce so."

As a matter of fact, the baggage wagon had very poor springs and every time it went over a stone or slipped into a rut and out again, Sunny Boy could feel it. He could not know that the circus had pulled up stakes almost before the last act in the ring was finished. Indeed, Mr. Whitlock announced that the bear would not dance, though he was advertised to end the program. The circus owner was afraid that someone connected with the circus would see or hear of the poster advertising for a missing boy, and

he wanted to get out of town as soon as he could.

They traveled all night and in the morning several people besides Sunny Boy were surprised. They had not gone to Waterville at all! Instead, they stopped on the outskirts of a town called Leadville, and as the advertising man had not been ahead to tell the people a circus was coming, it seemed that there would not be very large audiences for the two performances scheduled for that day.

Sunny Boy understood this when he heard voices outside the door of the wagon. He had discovered, as soon as it grew light, that there was a knot-hole in one side of the wagon, and by looking through this with one eye he could see that the wagon had stopped in a big tract of sandy land, dotted with scrubby little pine trees.

"All the people in this town have gone on an all-day excursion," Sunny Boy heard a voice say.

He knew it was Hank, though he could not see him.

"Yes, we're lucky if we take in a nickel,"

someone else answered. "The elephants won't perform, either, because Jake left last night; took French leave. Amos is so up in the air that I suspect Jake must have taken that strange boy along with him. Haven't seen him since supper last night."

"That's so—he did disappear," Sunny Boy heard Hank say. "Well, I hope the kid gets back to his own home. And Princess Flora won't speak to Amos, because she thought we were going to Waterville."

"We all thought we were going to Waterville," grumbled the other voice.

Then the speakers moved away and Sunny Boy stood up straight and yawned and wished he had some breakfast.

"Jake said to stay with the circus and wait," he thought a bit worriedly. "But that was when he thought we were going to Waterville. He'll tell Daddy that is where I have gone and perhaps Daddy will go there, and then how can he find me?"

Before he could work out this new problem a key turned in the padlock and the door opened.

"So there you are, eh?" said Ben, the clown, looking in at him disapprovingly. "I must say you behave nice the minute my back is turned. Here's your breakfast. Eat it quick."

He closed the door of the wagon all but a narrow crack and sat down on the steps to wait while Sunny Boy ate the sandwich and drank the mugful of milk he had brought him.

"Can't I come out?" asked Sunny Boy, thrusting the empty mug through the door and unfortunately letting it drop on the head of the clown, who was seated on the lowest of the three iron steps.

"Just for that, you stay in all day," the clown said crossly. "I'll put you through some setting up exercises in an hour or two, but you stay in this wagon till Amos is good and ready to let you out."

He rubbed his head where the heavy china mug had struck him, shut the door, but softly so

that no one would hear, and locked it again.

"Sunny Boy!" breathed another voice a few minutes later. "Sunny Boy!"

It was Jimmy, the half-grown boy who sold tickets, and when Sunny Boy answered him he told him to keep very still.

"Princess Flora told me you were locked up in here," whispered Jimmy. "She says Amos wants the circus folks to think that you've run off with Jake, in case any one comes around asking for you; so he plans to keep you locked up for a week at least. Can you hear me?"

"Sometimes," Sunny Boy whispered back. "But your voice sounds funny."

"I'm under the wagon," said Jimmy. "Princess Flora told me there is a bolt under here that unscrews and lets a section of the flooring out. This used to be an animal wagon, before they fixed it up for extra baggage. If you're in the center of the floor, Sunny Boy, get as far away as you can—get 'way up against the front."

Sunny Boy obediently backed away, and there

before his eyes a large square of the floor boards creaked and dropped out. Jimmy stuck his head up through the hole.

"Most everyone is snoozing to make up for the sleep they lost last night," he told Sunny Boy. "Princess Flora says you're to take this and scoot. She says to follow the road and to stop the first person you meet, tell him who you are and ask him to take you to the nearest constable. Run now, before someone comes strolling along and finds you."

He stuffed something into Sunny Boy's hand and lifted him down through the hole.

"Good luck, kid! Run!" Jimmy whispered excitedly, and Sunny Boy crawled out from under the wagon and began to run without looking to the left or the right.

He knew when he reached the road, for he saw the gray dirt under his feet, but he didn't stop running. He didn't even know that he was clutching tightly in his hand two one-dollar bills the kind Princess Flora had sent him to buy food

if he should be hungry. All Sunny Boy knew was that he was getting away from the circus and that the first person he met he was to stop and tell what had happened to him.

Sunny Boy was almost out of breath and his face was red and dripping with perspiration when something black began moving toward him from down the road. He was too excited to realize it was an automobile till, with a blast of the horn, it stopped and someone gave a flying leap over the still closed door.

"Sunny Boy!" Mr. Horton shouted. "Sunny Boy!"

"Daddy, *Daddy*, DADDY!" Sunny Boy cried, as he felt himself lifted up in those strong arms. "I've had the *worst* time! How is Joe Blake, Daddy? And did you get Mr. Ketcham into the soldier's home?"

The blue-coated policeman in the automobile laughed and Mr. Horton laughed a little bit, too, when he told his son that Mr. Ketcham was in the home.

For everything was all right again and Sunny Boy could afford to laugh and so could his daddy. It was Jake, the elephant man, who had telephoned Mr. Horton, a long-distance call, and told him about the circus. And it was the Waterville police that had found that the circus, instead of coming to their town, had made a detour. So the blue-coated policeman and Mr. Horton had started in the car to find the circus, and, instead, they had found Sunny Boy.

Sunny Boy and his daddy took the policeman, who Sunny Boy found was a very pleasant man indeed, back to Waterville. While there he and Daddy telephoned both to Centronia and to Mr. Blake in Hopton.

Sunny Boy could hear his mother sob when she heard his voice over the long-distance wire, but that was because she was so glad he was found.

Mr. Blake said that Joe would certainly be glad to hear the news, for he was sure that it had been his fault that Sunny Boy got lost.

And, once safely back in Centronia with his

mother and his Aunt Bessie and Harriet almost afraid to let him out of their sight lest he be lost again, perhaps Sunny Boy didn't have things to tell Ruth and Nelson Baker! All the boys in the neighborhood came to hear about his adventures, and when Jake sent Sunny Boy a postal card from the farm at Waterville it was almost worn out, so many children had to read it.

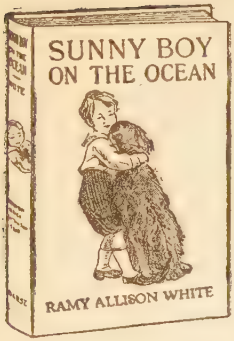
But Sunny Boy told Nelson the day after he was home that circus clowns were just as cross as they could be and that a boy could have more fun in his own yard than being an acrobat. And Sunny Boy ought to have known.

But Sunny Boy was to have many more adventures, and what some of those were will be related in another book entitled "Sunny Boy and His Trick Dog."

THE END

THE SUNNY BOY SERIES

By Ramy Allison White



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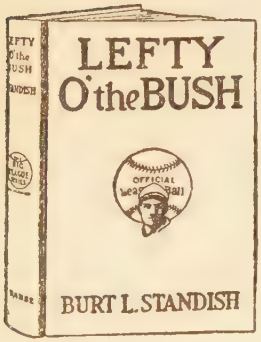

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